

Annex 1

SMART BALKANS: Civil Society for Shared Society in the Western Balkans

Guidelines for Regional Grants Concept Note

Call Reference No: SB RG 02/23
Deadline for submission 30.6.2023 at 17:00 h

Background

Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia as beneficiary countries of the SMART Balkans project form a geographical region in which politically, socially, culturally and historically these countries are linked.

Strengthening the capacity of CSOs in the region, through enhanced cooperation between civil society and government and through building regional partnerships at all levels to increase the influence of citizens in the decision-making process, will contribute to the desired change of creating peaceful and inclusive communities in the Western Balkans which will promote sustainable development of their societies¹. Civil society participation in the policy development processes is one of the most important ingredients to European integration. One of the Smart Balkans objectives is for the project to support the Euro-Atlantic integration of the region and considering that European integration is not just individual objective of each project's beneficiary countries, but of the region, the project aims to facilitate regional cooperation and networking towards that goal. For this purpose, SMART Balkan has designed the Regional grant scheme, although creating regional networks and partnerships will be stressed wherever possible.

Goals

Overall objective of the SMART Balkans project is to contribute to strengthening participatory democracies and Euro Atlantic integrations in the Western Balkans by empowering civil society organizations and CSO networks for stronger and active role in creating peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia.

¹ In line with the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 16: Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, ensure access to justice for all and build efficient, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels

Specific objectives of the SMART Balkans project are:

- Stronger, more sustainable, and vibrant CSOs in the six countries of the Western Balkans region
- Developed strong regional partnerships between civil society organizations from the region of the Western Balkans themselves and with their EU counterparts and public authorities
- Increased effectiveness of citizen influencing change through CSOs that advances Security and Stability and Governance in the Western Balkans region
- Increased awareness of public on importance of active participation of civil society in major development initiatives in the region of Western Balkans

Areas

Regional Grants are a funding mechanism for consortiums of minimum 3 CSOs from 3 countries, and / or formal or informal regional networks for projects related to Security and Stability, and Governance, with strong regional dimension.

While the type of activities to support the above priority areas are to be proposed by the applicant, the following non-exhaustive list of thematic examples can be given:

Security and Stability

- Preventing (combating) violent extremism and radicalization that leads to terrorism
- Disinformation as a regional security threat
- Arms trafficking
- Human trafficking
- Cybercrime as a destabilizer of security
- **The fight against regional organized crime**
- Prevention of money laundering
- The fight against terrorism
- Food security amid the armed conflict and climate change
- The influence of the climate change on the security and stability in the region
- Energy security
- Enhancing (building/development of) local capacities for crisis management
- Intercultural dialogue
- Social cohesion, reconciliation and peace
- Human security and gender equality
- **Reduction of all forms of violence with focus on violence among and against youth (cooperation with governmental institutions and mechanisms is strongly recommended)**
- Cyber security and cyber safety
- Data privacy
- Overseeing security institutions/monitoring the implementation of security and stability policies

Governance

- Promoting digital literacy
- Freedom of expression
- **Civil society participation in regional decision making processes**

- **Fight against regional fake news/disinformation**
- **Euro-Atlantic integration**
- Digitalization
- Public administration reforms
- Hidden economy
- Corruption, including high level corruption

Expected results

- Developed strong regional partnerships between civil society organizations and institutions from the region of the Western Balkans
- Developed strong regional partnership between CSOs and with their EU counterparts and public authorities
- Increased effectiveness of citizen influencing through regional networking on Security and Stability and Governance in the Western Balkans region

Timeframe for project implementation

Duration of supported initiatives will be from **18 to 22 months**.

Selection process for applications received in response to this of Call for Applications is planned to be finalized until end of November 2023 and start of the approved projects is planned for December 2023. The SMART Balkans reserve the right to change the timeline of the application process, as the evaluation period may vary depending on the number of applicants received.

Financial frame

Total amount available for distribution under this call is 17,296,200 NOK (approximately 1,695,705 EUR), for 9 grants, with individual award amount range from 912,000 NOK to 1,921,800 NOK (89,400 - 188,400 EUR).

Contribution by the applicant is not required, although it is allowed.

Eligible and non-eligible costs

Eligible costs for funding are:

- Generally eligible expenditures that comply with the principles of sound financial management (principles of economy, efficiency and effectiveness)
- Reasonable and acceptable as per the approved budget
- Directly related to the program
- Presented and supported by valid documentation which clearly shows the nature of the expenditures
- Incurred during the project, from the start date to the end date specified by the contract

Non eligible costs are:

- Debts and debt service charges
- Provisions for losses or potential future liabilities
- Purchase of land, buildings and vehicles
- Costs for profitable activities
- Activities already financed through other grants
- Cost incurred before the contract signature
- Credits to third parties
- Regranting
- Any other non-eligible costs defined in the grant contract

Eligibility of applicants

Civil society organizations from all 6 countries, applying in consortiums of minimum 3 CSOs from 3 countries can apply for Regional Grants. Also, already formed regional networks are eligible to apply. The applicants must have experience in working in the Western Balkans region and with various stakeholders (state and non-state).

The applicants must be registered² in the Grants Management Platform – <https://gmp.smartbalkansproject.org/>

See tutorial for registration [Grants Management Platform - How to use? 💡 - YouTube](#)

In order to be eligible for a grant, the lead applicant and its partners must:

- be a legal person **and**
- be non-profitmaking **and**
- be a civil society organization (CSO)³ or a formal or nonformal network of CSOs working on one or more thematic areas of relevance to this Call for Applications, excluding political, faith based and religious organizations as well as local branches of international organizations **and**
- be established in one of six targeted countries **and**

² Registration process is not automatic and may last for a few days. It is recommended to start registration at least 10 days before the deadline.

³ Civil society organizations, associations and foundations registered in accordance with the following laws: **Albania:** Law no. 8788 For the Non-Profit Organization, and Law no. 8989 For the Registration of Non – Profit Organization, **Bosnia and Herzegovina:** The Law on Association and Foundation at levels of BiH, FBiH, RS and DB, Youth Law of FBiH, Law on Youth Organizing of the Republic of Srpska, **Kosovo:** Law on Freedom of Associations in Non-Governmental Organizations, **Montenegro:** Law on non – governmental organization, **North Macedonia:** Law on Associations of Citizens and Foundations, **Serbia:** Law on Associations; Law on Endowments and Foundations.

- be directly responsible for the preparation and management of the project with their partners, not acting as an intermediary **and**
- have as a minimum one year (i.e. 12 months) experience in the areas of this call under which the concept note is submitted. In case the lead applicant is a network of CSOs, this applies also to its members.

Partners (co-applicants) must satisfy the eligibility criteria as applicable to the lead applicant itself.

Legal entities and individuals that appear on the EU Consolidated list of persons, groups and entities subject to EU financial sanctions (www.sanctionmaps.eu), The Office of Foreign Assets Control ("OFAC") of the US Department of the Treasury <https://sanctionssearch.ofac.treas.gov/> and The UK Sanctions List <https://docs.fcdo.gov.uk/docs/UK-Sanctions-List.html> are **not eligible** to apply on this call.

APPLICATION PROCESS

In order to support high quality of applications and to optimize selection process, the application process for the Regional Grants will have 2 steps:

- 1) CONCEPT NOTE approval stage - based on the Concept note with a brief outline of proposed projects, team of evaluators and the Selection Committee will perform evaluation of the Concept Notes, in line with the criteria given in this Guidelines. Result of this step is the short list of the applicants that will be invited to submit Full Application for Regional Grant. Number of applicants with Concept Notes shall be at least twice the number of Full Applications that will be supported through the project.
- 2) FULL APPLICATION approval stage - Submitted Full Applications then will be reviewed and evaluated by two independent experts/evaluators. After the full proposals' evaluation, the Selection Committee will decide on the grants' recipients.

Number of applications and grants per applicants

The lead applicant **may not** submit more than **1** application under this call for applications. However, it **may** be a partner in **1** other application of the same call at the same time.

The lead applicant **may** be awarded more than **1** grant under this call for applications (once as a Lead Applicant, and second as a partner).

A CSO **may** be the partner in maximum **2** applications under this call for applications.

Organizations that are **currently leading** one of the 9 regional projects are **not eligible** for this public call as lead applicant. Organization that is a partner in the regional project can apply under this call as lead applicant, or as a partner. Organizations that are supported under **another grant line** within the SMART Balkans project can also apply to this public call. It is possible to have 2 on-going contracts for projects within SMART Balkans but in different grant lines.

LIST OF REQUIRED DOCUMENTS FOR CONCEPT NOTE STAGE OF APPLICATION

- Concept Note (Annex 2)
- Partnership statement (Annex 3)⁴

SUBMISSION OF CONCEPT NOTE APPLICATIONS

Concept Notes Applications shall be submitted online via Grants Management Platform (GMP) <https://gmp.smartbalkansproject.org> the deadline for submission is 30.06.2023. 17:00.

Please note that each applicant should register in the Grants Management Platform **prior to** submitting the application documents. It is strongly recommended that organizations register to GMP (if organization is not already registered), at least 7 working days before date of applying for grant.

An online info session is planned for 16.06.2023. at 14:00h. You can find the link for the registration for the info session [here](#).

Questions regarding this Call can be sent to the e-mail address by e-mail grants1@smartbalkansproject.org until the deadline listed on the Public Call Timeline section.

Answers to all questions will be published on the GMP, no later than 10 days before the Concept Note submission deadline.

PUBLIC CALL TIMELINE

Call for Application Calendar	Deadline
Published Call for Regional Grants Concept Note Applications	31.05.2023.
Info Session	16.06.2023.
Questions regarding Call for Application	19.06.2023.
Answers to questions regarding Call for Application posted on GMP	20.06.2023.
Submission of Concept Note Application	30.06.2023.
Invitation of successful Concept Note Applicants to submit Full Applications*	10.08. 2023.
Submission of Full Application*	29.09. 2023.
Announcement of Full Applications selection results*	31.10. 2023.
Signature of grant award contracts*	22.11. 2023.

⁴ It is necessary to ensure that all partners are registered in GMP, and all partnership statements are accepted through GMP.

**Tentative plan*

CONCEPT NOTES EVALUATION CRITERIA

As part of the administrative evaluation, the Consortium reserves the right to verify information and documents submitted by applicants, with authorized providers of such services and / or state institutions.

The concept notes will be evaluated against criteria set below.

The concept notes will receive an overall score out of 50 maximum points using the breakdown in the evaluation grid below.

The evaluation criteria are divided into headings and subheadings. Each subheading will be given a score between 1 and 5 as follows: 1 = very poor; 2 = poor; 3 = adequate; 4 = good; 5 = very good.

CRITERIA	Score	
1. Relevance of the project	Sub-score	20
1.1 How relevant is the proposal to the objectives and priorities of the call for applications? How is the proposal relevant to the specific themes/sectors/areas or any other specific requirements and guidance stated in the guidelines for applicants? Are the expected results of the project aligned with the expected results defined in the guidelines for applicants?	5	
1.2 How relevant is the proposal to the particular needs and constraints of the target enlargement region and/or relevant sectors? Are there any value-added aspects and synergy with other relevant initiatives in the region and what are the efforts to avoid duplication?	5	
1.3 Have the final beneficiaries and target groups been strategically chosen and clearly defined? Have their needs (as rights holders and/or duty bearers) and constraints been clearly defined and does the proposal address them appropriately?	5	
1.4 Does the proposal contain particular added-value elements (e.g. innovation, best practices, constructive partnerships with authorities, relevant bodies; promotion of gender equality and equal opportunities, needs of marginalized population, environmental protection) or covering one of the areas in focus?	5	
2. Design of the project	Sub-score	30
2.1 How coherent is the overall design of the project? Does the proposal indicate the expected results to be achieved by the project? Does the intervention logic explain in a convincing way how the expected	5x2*	

CRITERIA	Score	
results will be achieved? Are the results indicators measurable and gender sensitive?		
2.2 Does the design reflect an analysis of the problems involved, and the capacities of the relevant stakeholders?	5	
2.3 Does the design take into account external factors (risks and assumptions) and include plans to adapt to such risks materialising, or assumptions not being fulfilled?	5	
2.4 Are the activities feasible and consistent in relation to the expected results (including timeframe)? Are results realistic?	5	
2.5 Is there a strong regional aspect of the project?	5	
TOTAL SCORE		50

**Double points*

Only the concept notes with a score of at least 30 will be considered for pre-selection.

The number of concept notes that will be invited for full application will be two times bigger than the number of grants the program will award (taking into account that the total value of the allocated funds cannot exceed the planned value for this type of grant). The short list for full application will be based on the ranking of the Concept notes by evaluators and the Selection Committee.

INVITATION OF SUCCESSFUL CONCEPT NOTE APPLICANTS TO SUBMIT FULL APPLICATION

Based on evaluation of received Regional Grants Concept Notes and the Selection Committee decision short listed applications will be invited to submit Full Application for the Project.

RIGHT TO APPEAL

The right of appeal is allowed to all unsuccessful applicants within **7 days** from the receipt of the *Notification to the unsuccessful applicants'* letter, via grants1@smartbalkansproject.org

The SMART Balkans Project must reply to the potential appeals within **10 working days** from the date of receipt of the appeal. All correspondence must be addressed in writing, in English language.