Contracting Authority:

WESTERN BALKANS FUND

> **CN 2023/449-078**
> **Support to the promotion of Civil Society regional actions in the Western Balkans (Phase II)**
> **-**
> **ERC Grants**

Empowering Regional Cooperation Grants

Application Guideline

Empowering Regional Cooperation Grants

Deadline for submission of full application: **17th of June 2024**

Table of Contents

1. Support to the promotion of civil society regional action in the Western Balkans (Phase II)

1.1. Background

The Western Balkans region includes **Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo***[1], **Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia**. This area shares a common history and culture, and its long-term goal is to join the European Union (EU) for stability and development. However, historical legacies can sometimes hinder cooperation.

The Western Balkan Fund (WBF), created by the Foreign Ministries of WB6, promotes regional cooperation and reconciliation. It supports local organizations in implementing projects that enhance peace, stability, and cooperation.

The **Empowering Regional Cooperation** (ERC) Grants provide financial support for projects that align with WBF's goals. These grants aim to enhance regional cooperation, promote networking, and encourage innovative approaches to foster reconciliation. The initiative improves CSO performance and engagement in regional cooperation, supports CSOs in advocating for marginalized groups, and facilitates reconciliation processes. ERC empowers underrepresented communities to take on leadership roles and contribute to decision-making. The grants also monitor the participation of marginalized groups and encourage higher inclusion rates for a more diverse civil society landscape.

WBF's ERC Grant scheme ensures that regional needs are addressed equally across all six WBF Contracting Parties. This initiative is supported by the European Union and aims to strengthen democracy in the region by funding joint initiatives from civil society organizations.

The Application Guideline outlines the rules for WBF's ERC Grants and helps potential applicants prepare and submit their proposals.

1.2. Objectives and areas of intervention

The **overall objective** of this initiative is to strengthen regional partnerships and enhance Civil Society Organization (CSO) involvement in the Western Balkans, promoting democracy and active citizenship.

Specific objectives include:

- **Establishing partnerships** among CSOs across the region to work on shared challenges.

- **Boosting CSO capacity** through training and support to help them actively promote inclusive democracy.

- **Promoting inclusivity** by supporting marginalized groups such as women, youth, ethnic minorities, and vulnerable populations in decision-making and advocacy.

Outcomes include:

- **Regional partnerships** are established and reinforced by addressing common challenges and achieving shared goals.

---

[1] *This designation is without prejudice to position on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence

- Regional actors' **capacities are increased** through training activities, awareness campaigns, and research for policy development targeting specific audiences.

- **Increased inclusion** of marginalized groups in regional activities, empowering underrepresented communities to take on leadership roles.

- **Enhanced inclusiveness** in civil society to better represent the diverse needs and perspectives of communities.

The initiative **target groups** are all non-state, non-profit organizations such as: CSOs, business and media associations, educational and cultural associations, sport associations, and more. However, applicants are encouraged to engage, other than partners, key stakeholders including WBF founders, local governments, international donors, and the communities themselves.

The **primary beneficiaries** of the action are:

- CSOs, foundations, non-for-profit organizations, regional networks.

- Business associations such as business clusters, agriculture associations, chambers of commerce, tourist association.

- Media associations such as organizations working with media, journalism and freedom of expression.

- Educational associations such as association of cultural institutions, sport associations, etc.

The **final beneficiaries** are communities in the Western Balkans 6, who will experience improved neighborly relations, harmony, and regional cooperation on the path towards EU integration.

The key **stakeholders of this action** include but are not limited to, the WBF founders and Secretariat, CSOs, grass-root organisations, local governments/authorities, international donor organizations, media, and the communities themselves. WBF founders, more specifically Ministries of Foreign Affairs (MFA), acknowledge the importance of enhancing the WBF's role in addressing regional cooperation through bottom-up approach where the inputs are collected and transmitted to a decision-making level.

ERC Grants **areas of intervention** for this call represent the key priorities and strategic objectives identified by WBF. Projects can cover one or several of the following areas of intervention:

I.   Cultural cooperation: Fostering regional cultural identity and intercultural dialogue in the Western Balkans by promoting cooperation in sustainable initiatives, activities, and projects to embrace a shared commitment to both environmental stewardship and peaceful coexistence and nurture nature and cultural bonds for a harmonious and eco-conscious region.

II. Education and Scientific exchanges: Advancing regional projects and activities in education development, capacity building, and mobility to foster growth and extension with a commitment to the green agenda by integrating environmentally conscious practices into educational initiatives and promoting scientific exchanges for sustainable regional development.

III. Sustainable Development: Promoting regional cohesion and fostering institutional partnerships for sustainable economic development through integration of green agenda into environmental responsible practices, ensuring a harmonious balance between regional growth and ecological well-being.

Note: Activities presented above under each Area of Intervention are indicative and the list is not exhaustive.

1.3. Financial allocation provided by the Contracting Authority

The overall indicative amount made available under this Call for Proposals is <u>EUR 360,000</u>.

The EU/WBF Joint Action shall respect and ensure balanced distribution of funds per each contracting party of the Western Balkans Fund (WB6).

*The Contracting Authority reserves the right not to award all available funds or cancel the call, should the quality or number of proposals received be insufficient.

1.4. Size of grants

The EU/WBF Joint Action will fund <u>up to maximum</u> grant per project of <u>30,000 EUR</u>.
<u>Minimum</u> requested amount of the grant <u>must be 20,000 EUR</u>.

- The ERC Grant <u>shall not exceed 80%</u> of total eligible costs of the action.
- Co-financing amount committed by the applicant must **not fall below 20%** of the total eligible costs of the action[2].
- In-kind contributions are **not accepted as eligible co-financing** for this Call for Proposals.

Projects with higher co-financing levels will be prioritized for funding due to their greater potential for impact. A minimum of 7,500 EUR is required as co-financing if asking the maximum amount of grant. However, higher amounts of co-financing are encouraged.

Example of the co-financing formula:
Max. Size of the Grant (30,000EUR) + 20% Co-financing (7,500 EUR) = Total Amount of Eligible Costs (37,500 EUR)

1.5. Duration

The project duration <u>may not be lower than 3 (three) months nor exceed 7 (seven) months, including Reporting Period (last 30 days within the implementation timeframe)</u>.

2. RULES FOR THIS CALL FOR PROPOSALS

2.1. Eligibility of Applicants

To be eligible to apply for the ERC grant, the lead applicant must be:
- a legal person, (natural persons or entities without legal persons are not eligible) **and**
- established in one or more of the WBF Contracting Parties, **and**
- non-profitmaking, **and**

---

[2] <u>Clarification</u>: Being that this Call for Proposal are supported by the European Union, the co-financing amount may not come from other European Union funds.

Be a specific type of organisation from one of the following categories:

- A Civil Society Organization[3] [4] (CSO/NGO)
- A business association such as: association of enterprises, agriculture association, chamber of commerce, tourism association, etc.
- Media associations such as: organizations working with media, journalism, and freedom of expression.
- Educational associations such as: association of cultural institutions, sport associations, etc.

Number of applications and grants that could be awarded to lead applicant and co-partners:

"Under this Call for Proposal, an applicant may apply multiple times as Lead or be partner in several applications, however, may be awarded only 1 (one) grant (highest scored) as Lead Applicant and/or 1 (one) grant (highest scored) as Project Partner."

The lead applicant shall remain committed to successfully implement the action and be financially engaged, by providing a direct financial contribution (co-financing to the project). Lead Applicant may choose to share the expenditures with the Project Partners, however the Lead Applicant is the sole responsible, as contract signatory with WBF, for the sound implementation, funds expenditure and reporting under this call for proposal.

The lead applicant shall prove (through experience cards in the application) ongoing/active experience in implementing Donor Funder projects at least in the last three (3) years.

2.2. Eligibility of Partnership

Partnership is required to apply for the ERC Call for Proposal. Partnerships must include Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) or institutions that align with the project's goals:

- Diverse Representation: Partnerships must include participants from at least four (4) different WBF Contracting Parties (CPs).
- Partnership Structure: Each partnership should have one (1) lead applicant and at least three (3) project partners from WBF Contracting Parties to ensure diversity and effectiveness in tackling regional challenges.
- Lead Applicant's Role: The lead applicant is responsible for submitting the project proposal, signing the Declaration by the Lead Applicant, signing the grant agreement with the WBF, and representing the partnership. Partners must meet the lead applicant's eligibility criteria, except for experience.

However, partnerships formed from more than 4 CPs are encouraged to apply and will be prioritized when evaluating the proposals.

---

[3] Clarification: An organisation's must be established under the national law and its seat is in one of WBF contracting parties.

[4] Civil society is highly heterogeneous and encompasses a wide range of actors and aims. The EU considers civil society organisations to embrace a wide range of actors with multiple roles and mandates which includes all non-State, not-for-profit, independent and non-violent structures, through which people organise to pursue shared objectives and ideals, whether political, cultural, religious, environmental, social or economic or related to health […] They include, but are not limited to: Non-governmental organisations, organisations representing indigenous peoples, women's and youth organisations, diaspora organisations, migrants' organisations, local traders' associations and citizens' groups, cooperatives, employers' associations and trade unions (social partners), organisations representing economic and social interests, organisations fighting corruption and fraud and promoting good governance, civil rights organisations and organisations combating discrimination, local organisations (including networks) involved in decentralised regional cooperation and integration, consumer organisations, environmental, teaching, cultural, research and scientific organisations, universities, churches and religious associations and communities, philosophical and non-confessional organisations, the not-for-profit media and any non-governmental associations and independent foundations, including independent political foundations.

Please note that
Profit making companies, political parties;
Organisations dealing mostly or only with political and religious activities;
Central and Local Government Entities/Units/Directorates, Government funded organisations/entities (Museums, Universities, etc.);
are not eligible under this specific call for proposals, neither as Lead Partner nor as Project Partner.
Application which does not comply with all above-described requirements will not be eligible.

2.3.   Eligibility of Costs

Eligible costs will be reimbursed based on the actual expenses incurred, as outlined in the budget. The budget must be well-planned, simple, and realistic, using market rates for cost estimations in EUR. Only costs listed in the budget will be financed. Applicants must provide detailed justifications for project costs and financing sources in Annex B (Budget of the Action).

Exclusion Criteria

Applicants must comply with ERC requirements and avoid any legal or financial issues that could disqualify them from participating or receiving grants. The exclusion criteria are specified in Annex C: Declaration by the Lead Applicant, which must be signed and stamped by the lead applicant, where they declare that they and their project partners do not meet any exclusion criteria, ensuring legal and financial integrity.

Financial Principles: Funding adheres to WBF's Financial Regulation, emphasizing co-financing, prohibition of double financing, and the non-profit rule. This ensures grants do not lead to profit for beneficiaries and maintain transparency and responsibility in financial allocations.

Eligible costs

- The total costs for human resources must not exceed 15% of the total amount granted from WBF.
  (Ex. If Max Grant from WBF 30,000 EUR -> HR up to 4,500 EUR)
- The expertise costs must not exceed 15% of the total amount granted from WBF.
  (Ex. If Max Grant from WBF 30,000 EUR -> Experts up to 4,500 EUR)
- Indirect costs must not exceed 7% of the subtotal direct eligible costs.
- Cost incurred by the Lead Applicant and/or Project Partners for the implementation of the project.
- Costs incurred within the timeframe of the implementation of the project.

When planning the budget, it is important to adhere to the following list of eligible cost categories, i.e.costs that can be covered by the Fund:
1. Human resource costs up to 15% of the total amount granted by WBF:
   a. The cost of staff assigned to the action (gross salaries of the dedicated project personal including social security charges and other related costs, excluding bonuses); salaries and costs shall not exceed those normally borne by the beneficiary(ies), unless it is justified by showing that it is essential to carry out the action.
2. Travel and Accommodation (including board) costs
   a. Travel and accommodation costs for staff and other people taking part in the action, provided they do not exceed those normally borne by the beneficiary(ies) according to its rules and regulations. (i.e., Accommodation costs up to 65 EUR/night, Accommodation and board up to 100 EUR/night.
   b. Travel costs need to be justified as the most cost-effective option.
   c. Travel on a personal vehicle will be allowed only if properly justified and calculated in basis of 0.3 EUR/km).

3. Other direct costs, services
   a. Rent of premises and related technical services, renting costs for equipment (new or used) and supplies specifically dedicated to the purposes of the action, costs of services and supplies purchased by the beneficiary(ies) for the purposes of the action.
   b. Financial service costs (bank charges and bank guarantee costs related to the action).
   c. Expertise costs, up to 15% of the Total Granted amount from WBF. Experts should be external and must not be employees of any of the organizations partnered in the project.

Eligible indirect costs

The indirect costs incurred in carrying out the action may be eligible for flat-rate funding, but the total must not exceed 7% of the estimated total eligible direct costs (e.g. accountancy, running expenses, un-foreseen costs in the direct costs of the actions (subject above eligibility of costs), etc.).

Indirect costs estimated as of the above are eligible if they do not include costs assigned to another budget heading in the standard grant contract and are related to the implementation of the project. **The lead applicant may be asked to justify the percentage requested before the grant contract is signed. However, once the flat rate has been fixed in the special conditions of the grant contract, no supporting documents need to be provided, unless the CA deems necessary to ask justifying documents in the Reporting Phase.**

Since the same cost could be treated as direct or indirect cost, the applicant will describe in the application form which costs have been included in the category of the indirect costs allotted to the action.

Ineligible costs

The following costs cannot be covered by the WBF grant:
1. Costs incurred for Applicant's activities undertaken before signature of the contract.
2. Debts and debt service charges (interest).
3. Provisions for losses, or potential future liabilities.
4. Applicant's activities aimed at profit making activities.
5. Applicant's activities that are affiliated directly with/or supportive to political or religious agendas.
6. Costs declared by the beneficiary(ies) and financed by another action or work programme receiving a European Union grant.
7. Purchases of equipment, land or buildings.
8. Currency exchange losses.
9. Credits to third parties, unless otherwise specified in the special conditions.
10. Bonuses included in costs of staff; customs and import duties, or any other charges.
11. Fines, financial penalties and expenses of litigation.
12. Taxes[5], including VAT. (Except when it is non-recoverable under national VAT legislation might be eligible and/or declared in the Declaration by Lead Applicant).
13. Beneficiary's individual sponsorships for participation in workshops, seminars, conferences, congresses.
14. Alcohol and tobacco costs
15. Visibility Costs (Visibility must be ensured with no specific expenditures other than the costs related to the implementation of the Action Activities).

Contributions in kind are not eligible under this Call for Proposals

---

[5] Excluding HR related Taxes and Withholding Tax

2.4. Eligibility of Activities

The project shall encompass a range of activities aimed at achieving its objectives and maximizing its impact. Project actions shall include regional events, awareness-raising campaigns, and networking efforts, advocacy events all of which serve to mobilize stakeholders and inform them about the project's mission. Any event that is focused on building a sense of community and exchanging best practices, fostering a spirit of cooperation among members, is recommended.

Eligible types of Activities:

- **Capacity Building Activities:** may be defined as a planned comprehensive effort to increase effectiveness and viability by targeting as direct beneficiaries the CSOs. Effectiveness is the measure of how well an organisation is doing the right things to accomplish its purpose. It is determined by whether an organisation has the right framework and is following the right approach to achieve its core objective.

- **Advocacy Activities:** include actions that contribute to a more conducive environment for organisations by lobbying and advocating to decision-makers, media outreach, citizen education, and various forms of civic engagement.

- **Networking Activities:** gatherings aimed at fostering professional and knowledge sharing relationships among organisations enabling them to exchange ideas, broaden connections, and discover opportunities.

Note: All activities MUST ensure Regional Balance and non-discriminatory participation in the Events.

Project proposals must take into account the mainstreaming of cross-cutting issues at project level and at least three are mandatory to be part of the project proposal. When developing a project to address any of the specific objectives of the call, cross-cutting issues need to be mainstreamed in the following manner:

1) Green Agenda
2) Regional Outreach
3) Gender Sensitive
4) Conflict Sensitivity
5) Knowledge Sharing
6) Promotion of Marginalized Groups
7) Freedom of Expression
8) EU Integration
9) Reconciliation
10) Innovation and Digitalization

Please note that mainstreaming cross-cutting issues is scored in the evaluation methodology of this Call for Proposals as formulated in Section 2.6, below.

Indicative types of activities which may be financed under this Call for Proposals are given below (please note that this list is non-exhaustive):

Cultural cooperation
• Cultural Competency Training: Provide training sessions on cultural competency, diversity awareness, and intercultural communication.
• Cross-Cultural Dialogue Workshops: Organize workshops and facilitated dialogues that bring together representatives from diverse cultural backgrounds to discuss shared values, traditions, and challenges.

• Capacity Building in Cultural Management: Offer training programs focused on building the capacity in cultural management, including project planning, implementation, and evaluation within the context of cultural cooperation initiatives.
• Cultural Exchange Programs: Facilitate cultural exchange programs that enable interaction with organizations from different cultural backgrounds.
• Community Engagement Initiatives: Support in developing community engagement initiatives that promote cultural diversity and inclusivity.
• Partnership Development Workshops: Provide training on partnership development and collaboration strategies specifically tailored to cultural cooperation initiatives.
• Capacity Building in Cultural Advocacy: Equip organisations with the skills and knowledge needed to advocate for cultural policies and initiatives at local, national, and international levels.
• Digital Cultural Engagement Training: Offer training sessions on leveraging digital tools and platforms for cultural engagement and cooperation.

Education and Scientific exchanges
• Training Workshops: Offer workshops and training sessions for educators and trainers within organisations to enhance their teaching skills, pedagogical techniques, and subject knowledge.
• Curriculum Enhancement Programs: Support in developing and implementing innovative educational curricula that integrate scientific concepts, critical thinking skills, and practical applications.
• Scientific Research and Inquiry Projects: Facilitate scientific research and inquiry projects for students and educators within organisations.
• Capacity Building in Science Communication: Provide training in science communication techniques to help CSOs effectively communicate scientific concepts and findings to diverse audiences.
• Partnership Development with Academic Institutions: Foster partnerships and collaboration with CSOs, academic institutions, research organizations, and scientific societies to leverage their expertise and resources.

Sustainable Development
• Training on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): Provide workshops and training sessions to CSOs on the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), their relevance to local contexts, and strategies for integrating them into organizational planning and programming.
• Project Management Workshops: Offer training programs focused on project management skills tailored to sustainable development initiatives.
• Capacity Building in Advocacy and Policy Influence: Equip organisations with the skills and knowledge needed to advocate for policies and practices that promote sustainable development at local, national, and international levels.
• Community Empowerment Initiatives: Support in developing community empowerment programs aimed at building local capacity to address sustainable development challenges.
• Environmental Conservation and Climate Action Training: Provide training sessions on environmental conservation, climate change adaptation, and mitigation strategies.
• Social Entrepreneurship and Income Generation: Offer training and support for organisations interested in developing social entrepreneurship initiatives.
• Resource Mobilization Strategies for Sustainable Funding: Assist organisations in developing training in grant writing, fundraising techniques, social enterprise development, and diversifying funding sources.

Location:
Activities should take place in the Western Balkans Region. Activities should take place in at least two of the Contracting Parties of WBF.

The following types of activities are ineligible:
- activities concerned only or mainly with individual sponsorships for participation in workshops, seminars, conferences, and congresses.
- activities concerned only or mainly religious and/or political activities.

Financial support to third parties

Applicants **may not** propose financial support to third parties. In other words, sub-granting is not allowed under this call for proposals.

Visibility

The beneficiaries must take all necessary steps to publicise the fact that the European Union has financed the action. As far as possible, actions that are funded by the European Union must incorporate information designed to raise the awareness of specific or general audiences of the reasons for the action and the European Union support for the action in the contracting parties and regions concerned, as well as the results and the impact of this support.

"The envisaged visibility must be ensured with no specific expenditures other than the costs related to the implementation of the Action Activities." Simplified, no visibility costs are accepted.

To maximize the impact of communication:
- Activities need to be timely.
- Information used must be accurate.
- The right audience (s) will be targeted.
- Messages will be interesting for the target audience (s)

Communication and visibility activities shall be coordinated closely with the WBF Secretariat.
The beneficiaries shall adhere to the WBF Communication and Visibility Guidelines during the entire contractual period. Inter alia, they will include the Fund's logo and a direct link to the Fund's web page on the website of their organisation. The beneficiaries are strongly encouraged to promote WBF on their social networking sites (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and LinkedIn) and also make references to the Fund's active accounts:
- Facebook https://www.facebook.com/WesternBalkansFund/
- Twitter https://twitter.com/balkans_fund
- Instagram https://www.instagram.com/westernbalkansfund/
- LinkedIn https://www.linkedin.com/company/westernbalkansfund/

The Fund reserves the right to make use of the project results for its promotion.

Failing to comply with the above requirement will cause the rejection of the relevant applications.
Ethics Clauses and Code of Conduct
   a) *No Conflict of Interest: Applicants must not have any conflict of interest with other applicants or parties involved in the actions. Attempts to obtain confidential information or influence the evaluation process will lead to rejection and penalties.*
   b) *Human Rights and Environmental Compliance: Applicants must comply with human rights, environmental legislation, and core labor standards. Zero tolerance for abuse, harassment, and exploitation.*
   c) *Anti-Corruption and Anti-Bribery: Applicants must comply with anti-bribery and anti-corruption laws. Project financing may be suspended or canceled if corrupt practices are discovered.*
   d) *Unusual Commercial Expenses: Applications will be rejected or contracts terminated if unusual commercial expenses such as unexplained commissions or payments to front companies are found.*
   e) *Breach of Obligations, Irregularities, or Fraud: The Contracting Authority may suspend or cancel procedures or contracts if breaches, irregularities, or fraud are discovered.*

2.5. HOW TO APPLY AND THE PROCEDURES TO FOLLOW

The applicants will be required to complete and submit a full Project Application form through the Online Grant Management System (OGMS). ONLY the applications that pass the evaluation threshold will be further considered to be evaluated.

Information Sessions
Information sessions on this Call for Proposals will be held in Belgrade, Podgorica, Prishtina, Sarajevo, Skopje, Tirana, and other locations in the region. Please check the WBF webpage and social media pages for the exact Info-session schedule.

Partnership Platform
The Western Balkans Fund established a Partnership Platform in Facebook to assist applicants to find suitable Project Partners in the context of the preparation of this Call for Proposals.

The following partner search page supports the identification of potential project partners:

https://www.facebook.com/groups/WBFPartnershipPlatform/

Applicants are encouraged to post messages on partners' search and interact with each other. Announcements will be in the English language.

Where and how to send applications
Lead applicants are invited to submit project application on behalf of the established partnership, in English language, by using the online Grant Management System (OGMS). This system is developed to further facilitate the application process and is user friendly.
The online system will provide detailed information about the Annexes which are incorporated to the system. (Annex A, B, and C)

A project application includes the following documents:
1. Annex A – Application Form
2. Annex B – Budget of the Action
3. Annex C – Declaration by the Lead Applicant (signed and stamped)

The project application must be submitted electronically in the below web page:

https://wbfportal.org/applicant/login.html

Applications sent by other means (e.g. by fax, mail or by email) will be rejected. (In case of a system breakdown the applicants will be notified for further application instructions from the WBF Secretariat).

Upon submission of the Project Application online, the Lead Applicants will receive a confirmation of receipt with the link for the survey to be completed by the applicant. Should the confirmation of the receipt be not received within 7 days after the deadline please contact the WBF in writing by using the following email address: info@westernbalkansfund.org

Please note that incomplete applications will be rejected automatically by the system.
Hand-written applications will not be accepted.
Clarifications will only be requested when the information provided is not sufficient to conduct an objective assessment.

Deadline for submission of applications
The deadline for the submission of applications is: **17 June 2024, 23:59 hrs CET (time)**.

The lead applicant is advised to avoid waiting until the last day to submit the full application, since heavy Internet traffic or a fault with the Internet connection (including electricity failure, etc.) could lead to difficulties in submission.

Additional information
Inquiries pertaining to this Call for Proposals can be sent by e-mail no later than 15 days before the deadline for the submission of project proposals to the following e-mail address:

info@westernbalkansfund.org

The WBF has no obligation to provide clarifications to questions received after this date. Only the questions sent in written will be answered (no phone inquiries).

Replies will be summarised and publicised no later than 10 days before the deadline for submission of project proposals at the WBF website. Please note that the replies to the questions asked during the Information Sessions will also be published at the WBF website.

2.6. EVALUATION AND SELECTION OF PROJECT PROPOSALS

Applications will be examined and evaluated by the Contracting Authority (WBF) with the possible assistance of external assessors. The approval of the awarded projects will be made by the WBF Council of the Senior Officials[6] followed by the endorsement of the final award list by the WBF Conference of Ministers of Foreign Affairs.

According to WBF internal rules, the grant scheme implementation must respect and ensure balanced distribution of funds per each Contracting Party.

All applications will be evaluated according to the steps and criteria specified below in Step 2: Evaluation of Applications.

If the examination of the application reveals that the proposed action does not meet the eligibility criteria stated in Section 2.1., the application will be rejected on this sole basis without undertaking further evaluation steps.

STEP 1: Opening, Administrative and eligibility checks according to the eligibility criteria for the Lead applicant and partners.
During the opening and administrative and eligibility checks the following will be assessed:

    i.   If the deadline has been met. Otherwise, the application will be automatically rejected.
    ii.   If the project proposal satisfies the eligibility criteria specified in Chapters 2.1 – 2.4 of this Guidelines.
    iii.   If the project consists of minimum 4 project partners coming from four different WB6 Contracting Parties
    iv.   If the project application was submitted through Online Grant Management System
    v.   If the Declaration by the Lead applicant has been filled in and has been signed and stamped
    vi.   If the application is typed and is written in English
    vii. If the Budget is completed in the format requested, and stated in EUR

---

[6] Clarification: The Council of the Senior Officials of the Western Balkans Fund is composed by the appointed officials from the Ministries of Foreign Affairs of the WB6 members.

viii. If the duration of the action is minimum 3 months and does not exceed 7 months
ix. If the requested WBF/EU contribution (amount) is not exceeding 30,000 EUR
x. If the lead applicant is legal entity established in the WB6
xi. If the project partners are legal entities established in the WB6
xii. If the project partners are non-profit organizations/associations
xiii. If any of the requested information/document is missing or is incorrect, the application may be rejected on that sole basis and the application will not be evaluated further.

STEP 2: Evaluation of Applications
The project applications that pass the administrative and eligibility check will be evaluated on the relevance and design of the proposed action.

Step 3: Individual Evaluation of Full Applications

Name of the application:		
Scoring sections:	Specific Criteria	Justification
Full Application Evaluation		
Partnerships (up to 20 pts)	1. Does the partnership bring together partners from different parts of the region and with complementary expertise?	10 Points
	2. Are the roles of the project partners clearly defined, balanced and in line with the objectives of the project proposal?	10 Points
Regional Relevance: (up to 20 pts)	1. The context analysis presented in the project is well described.	5 Points
	2. The project has substantial regional relevance and involves collaboration and sharing of experiences among organisations in the WB Region to upscale their capacities, empower participations in decision making and/or creating networking opportunities?	10 Points
	3. The project proposal is innovative and presents in a clear way added value elements.	5 Points
Objective, Results and Activities: (up to 15 pts)	1. How well the project addresses the specific objective of this CfP? (Objective is written in a coherent and clear way.)	5 Points
	2. To what level the project addresses the expected results of this CfP? (Results are related to the objective and activities.)	5 Points
	3. Are activities described clearly and in a timely manner that do not hinder the implementation of the project within the contractual timeframe?	5 Points
Capacity, Experience and Risk Management (up to 15 pts)	1. Does the project team have the capacity and relevant experience to implement this project?	5 Points
	2. Has the project presented a viable risk management scenario?	5 Points
	3. The applicant outlined the sustainability plan of the project and its potential impact continuation after implementation.	5 Points
Target Audience and cross-cutting issues: (up to 10 points)	1. Does the applicant clearly present the Target Group and specify the needs, challenges, or opportunities faced with detailed outcomes and benefits that the project will bring for each target audience?	5 Points
		5 Points
	2. Does the project address value-added cross-cutting issues (Gender Equality, Green and Digital agenda, Inclusiveness of Youth, Inclusiveness of marginalised groups, Participatory	

	democracies, European Integration, Reconciliation)?	
Visibility (Up to 5 points)	1. Does the applicant clearly present a scenario on which will ensure the visibility of the project and Donor?	5 Points
Financial Envelope: (up to 15 points)	1. Has the organization presented a cost-realistic budget? 2. Are the costs presented in line with the activities described in the project? 3. Has the organization presented a budget that justifies properly the share and source of co-financing? Does the co-financing exceeds minimum co-financing criteria?	5 points 5 points 5 points
	Total score: 100	

Applications which obtain less than 55 points in the Full Application Evaluation will not be recommended for funding by the Evaluation Committee.

STEP 4 – Submission of supporting documents

For WBF to verify the eligibility of the Lead Applicant and the Project Partners, shortlisted applicants will be required to provide the following documents:
Supporting documents must be provided through OGMS system:

1. Partnership Agreement (WBF Format)
2. Scanned statute and the registration certificate
3. A bank account verification letter or a latest bank statement of the lead applicant detailing the account name, number/ Iban and the latest annual financial statements of the lead applicant.
4. A financial capacity form of the Lead Applicant (WBF Format)

The declaration by the Lead Applicant will be cross-checked with the supporting documents provided by the lead applicant. Any missing supporting document or any incoherence between the declaration by the Lead Applicant and the supporting documents may lead to the rejection of the application on that sole basis.

Any rejected application will be replaced by the next best placed application on the reserve list that falls within the available budget for this call for proposals.

After verifying the supporting documents, the WBF Evaluation Committee will make a final recommendation to the WBF Council of the Senior of Officials as the decision-making body for awarding the grants.

2.7. NOTIFICATION OF THE CONTRACTING AUTHORITY'S DECISION

Content of the decision
The Lead Applicants will be informed in writing of the contracting authority's decision concerning their application and, if rejected, the reasons for the negative decision. The decision will be disseminated through OGMS System.

Letters to successful Lead Applicants must be sent within 10 (ten) days of the award decision: unsuccessful lead applicants must be informed that they have not been selected (including the reasons why they were

unsuccessful) within 20 (twenty) days of the notification to the successful Lead Applicants.

An applicant believing that it has been harmed by an error or irregularity during the award process may lodge a complaint to the contracting authority who will endeavour to investigate the complaint and respond within 10 (ten) days.

Indicative timetable
The grant contract shall be signed preferably within 1 month following the notification of the award decision. Implementation of the project shall begin on the day following the signing of the Grant Contract.

	DATE	TIME
1. **Information meeting (if any)**	20/05/2024 – 31/05/2024	Please Check WBF Webpage
2. **Deadline for requesting any clarifications from the contracting authority**	15 days prior to deadline of submission	COB
3. **Last date on which clarifications are issued by the contracting authority**	10 days prior to the deadline of submissions	COB
4. **Deadline for submission of full applications**	17/06/2024	23:59 hrs
9. **Contract signature**	October 2024	N/A

Note: All times are in the time zone of the contracting party of WBF.

This indicative timetable refers to provisional dates and may be updated by the contracting authority during the procedure. In such cases, the interested parties will be informed by the Contracting Authority.

2.8. CONDITIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION AFTER THE CONTRACTING AUTHORITY'S DECISION TO AWARD A GRANT

Reporting
The WBF grantees are obliged to continuously update the WBF Secretariat for their activities and expenditures through the Online Grant Management System. Grantees shall submit a final narrative report, financial report, and scanned invoices on the eligible expenditures along with other relevant documentation of the project at the end of the period of implementation of the project. The draft final narrative report shall be submitted not later than 30 calendar days after the end of the period of implementation of the project activities.

Monitoring and evaluation
The WBF grantees (all partners included) are expected to monitoring project progress and evaluate its results, together with target groups as appropriate. Furthermore, project performance will be assessed on a regular basis by the designated WBF Programme Team Member. Some of the key elements and approaches of WBF monitoring and evaluation processes are technical monitoring, financial monitoring, and performance monitoring. Monitoring visits will be carried out by the designated WBF Programme Team Member and will be organized at the WBF Programme Team Member's discretion. The grantee shall be notified about the monitoring visit accordingly.

The WBF MEL Officer will act as depository of best practices to be proactively established, assembled, kept up to date and shared with grantees. For such to be effective, (i) the WBF Secretariat shall perform a lessons report after each selection/assignment process and (ii) awarded grantees shall provide within the time frame of 2 months after the termination of their activities a full report on activities including lessons identified that the EU/WBF Joint Action shall consider for future processes.

LIST OF ANNEXES

All annexes are foreseen to be incorporated on the Online Grant Management System. The applicants will find all related documents on the system.

Annex A: Grant Application Form
Annex B: Budget
Annex C: Declaration by the Lead Applicant