

Active Citizens Fund – Estonia

Guidelines for Applicants and Project Promoters

1 INTRODUCTION

Support to civil society is a key priority for **the EEA Grants 2014-2021**, funded by Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway in 15 EU Member States in Central and Southern Europe and the Baltics. Ten per cent of the total country allocations is set aside for a programme for civil society in each beneficiary state. The Active Citizens Fund is established under the priority sector ‘Culture, Civil Society, Good Governance and Fundamental Rights and Freedoms’, one of the five priority sectors agreed between the donors and the European Union. The fund shall contribute to the overall objectives of the EEA and Norway Grants, to reduce economic and social disparities, and to strengthen bilateral relations between the beneficiary and donor states.

The Open Estonia Foundation in consortium with the Network of Estonian Non-profit Organisations (NENO) have been selected as the Fund Operator of the Active Citizens Fund in Estonia by the Financial Mechanism Office. Between 2019 and 2023 a total of 3,3 million EUR will be available for Estonian CSOs through open calls for proposals and other support activities.

The purpose of these Guidelines for Applicants and Project Promoters is to provide an overview of the rules and regulations of the Active Citizens Fund – Estonia and provide further guidance to project applicants and project promoters in developing and implementing projects.

Definitions

Civil society organisation (CSO) is a non-profit making non-governmental organisation or foundation. Alternatively, maybe referred to as NGO.

Direct eligible expenditures for a project are those expenditures which are identified by the project promoter and/or the project partner, in accordance with their accounting principles and usual internal rules, as specific expenditures directly linked to the implementation of the project and which can therefore be booked to it directly.

Donor partnership project is a project implemented in close cooperation with a project partner whose primary location is in one of the Donor States, Iceland, Liechtenstein or Norway.

Indirect costs are all eligible costs that cannot be identified by the project promoter and/or the project partner as being directly attributed to the project but which can be identified and justified by its accounting system as being incurred in direct relationship with the eligible direct costs attributed to the project.

Fund Operator is a consortium of the Open Estonia Foundation and the Network of Estonian Non-profit Organisations responsible for the management of the Active Citizens Fund – Estonia.

Project partner is a legal person actively involved in, and effectively contributing to, the implementation of a project. It shares with the Project Promoter a common economic or social goal which is to be realised through the implementation of that project.

Project Promoter is a legal person having the responsibility for initiating, preparing and implementing a project.

Vulnerable groups refers to women, ethnic, minorities, immigrants, and other disadvantaged groups, who have not been part of the traditional mainstream that has benefitted from economic growth. For this reason, these disenfranchised groups have tended not to participate in the political process, nor have they learned the advocacy or monitoring skills needed to represent or safeguard their own interests.

2 PROGRAMME SCOPE

The **objective** of the Active Citizens Fund is: “Civil society and active citizenship strengthened and vulnerable groups empowered”. The Programme will seek to **develop the long-term sustainability and capacity of the civil society sector**, strengthening its role in **promoting democratic participation, active citizenship and human rights, and empowerment of vulnerable groups**.

The Programme will be implemented by way of five open calls for proposals. In addition, there will be activities aimed at capacity building during project preparation and project implementation phases conducted by consortium partner NENO.

Projects focusing on the following five areas are eligible for support:

- *Democracy, active citizenship, good governance and transparency*
- *Human rights and equal treatment through combating any discrimination on the grounds of racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, gender, disability, age, sexual orientation or gender identity*
- *Social justice and inclusion of vulnerable groups*
- *Gender equality and gender-based violence*
- *Environment and climate change*

3 OBJECTIVES

The overall objective of the Active Citizens Fund – Estonia is civil society and active citizenship strengthened, and vulnerable groups empowered. More specifically, the projects funded through the Programme shall contribute to the following **Outcomes**:

- 1. Strengthened democratic culture and civic awareness**
- 2. Increased support for human rights and equal treatment**
- 3. Vulnerable groups empowered**
- 4. Enhanced capacity and sustainability of civil society**

As cross-cutting concerns, the Programme encourages the following across all outcomes:

- Youth inclusion
- Strengthen the capacity and sustainability of the civil society sector
- Outreach to under-served geographic areas and target groups
- Focus on intercultural understanding with special emphasis on national minorities

The programme encourages project applicants to seek to engage the above-mentioned target groups and objectives into project design either by independently reaching out to or by partnering with NGOs that focus on these concerns.

Strengthening bilateral relations

The strengthening of bilateral relations and mutual knowledge and understanding by way of networking, exchange of experiences and shared results between civil society organisations (CSOs) and entities in the donor countries is an important priority for the Programme. We encourage the development of donor partnership projects and provide assistance in partner search together in partnership with Norwegian Helsinki Committee and Iceland Human Rights Centre. During the programme period match-making and networking opportunities will be made available through special calls. Successful donor partnership projects will be given an opportunity to apply for additional funding during project implementation phase to enhance bilateral activities. Specific information on such measures will be available at a later date during the project implementation phase.

Suggested measures

The following list is non-exhaustive and elaborates on the types of activities that are eligible for support:

- Advocacy, awareness-raising and outreach to citizens
- Watchdog and monitoring, including following up on recommendations of international monitoring bodies
- Citizen activism, volunteering and civic participation
- Participation in policy and decision-making processes, including promoting an enabling environment for civil society
- Support for freedom of expression, investigative journalism and media
- Countering hate speech, including support to networks working with hate crime victims
- Promoting LGBTI rights and anti-discrimination activities
- Capacity building of the civil society sector, including sustainability, networking and accountability of CSOs
- Partnerships between CSOs, public and private sector entities
- Civic education and training
- Research and analysis to inform policy-making
- Social innovation and social enterprise development
- Intercultural dialogue, including platforms for minority/majority interactions
- Inter-generational cooperation
- Awareness-raising and capacity building on environmental issues including climate change and adaptation
- Access to information, participation in decision-making and access to justice in environmental matters in accordance with the Aarhus Convention

The following eligibility conditions apply:

- Protection of the environment and climate change will only be supported as part of measures to promote civic participation, advocacy, social innovation and active citizenship
- Provision of welfare and basic services will only be supported as part of actions addressing awareness-raising, advocacy, empowerment and reform initiatives

3.1 Outcome 1: Strengthened democratic culture and civic awareness

Eligible areas of support:

- *Democracy, active citizenship, good governance and transparency*
- *Environment and climate change*

Wide-spread democratic values and practices are essential to the functioning of a strong and vibrant civil society. Civil society organisations mobilise participation in civic life, and play a key role in promoting active citizen engagement in decision-making at local, national and European levels.

The outcome will be achieved by strengthening advocacy and watchdog role of CSOs, mobilizing citizen participation, raising civic awareness, and promoting good governance and transparency. To further strengthen CSOs role in policy process the Programme will support enhanced cooperation, networking and coalition-building among CSOs and encourage the use of research and analysis to inform CSO advocacy that leads to enhanced understanding of challenges and increases their influence.

The Programme seeks to support various types of initiatives aiming at improving the understanding of the concept of active citizenship and fostering civic participation in public affairs, including the youth and the minorities.

Initiatives that safeguard civic space and promote and advocate for enabling environment for civil society, including good governance, transparency and access to information will also be supported. Under this outcome CSOs active in environmental affairs and climate change are eligible to apply for grants that aim to promote civic participation, advocacy and active citizenship and advocate for greater transparency and access to information in environmental affairs.

Projects funded under this Outcome must contribute to the following outcomes and to one or more of the outputs:

	Expected programme results	Indicators
Programme-level objective	Civil society and active citizenship strengthened, and vulnerable groups empowered	Number of people engaged in civil society organisation activities
Outcome 1	Strengthened democratic culture and civic awareness	Share of target group showing civic awareness
		Number of national policies and laws influenced by CSOs
		Number of local policies and laws influenced by CSOs
		Number of CSOs using evidence/research to support their advocacy and policy work
Output 1.1	Citizens involved in public policy decision-making by CSOs	Number of citizens consulted by CSOs on public policy decisions
Output 1.2	Civic awareness promoted	Number of CSOs providing civic education
		Number of people educated about civic rights and participation
		Number of innovative methods and approaches to foster civic participation developed
Output 1.3	Good governance and transparency promoted	Number of CSO initiatives focusing on good governance, transparency and access to information

3.2 Outcome 2: Increased support for human rights and equal treatment

Eligible areas of support:

- *Human rights and equal treatment through combating any discrimination on the grounds of racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, gender, disability, age, sexual orientation or gender identity*

- *Social justice and inclusion of vulnerable groups*
- *Gender equality and gender-based violence*

Fostering human rights and preventing discrimination and extremism are priorities for the donor countries. With growing political extremism across Europe, human rights and democratic values have been put under pressure.

The Programme seeks to support initiatives that strengthen CSOs in their role as preservers and fosterers of human rights, actively defend human rights and promote equal treatment on the grounds of racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, gender, disability, age, sexual orientation, etc. The Programme also seeks to support initiatives that promote values, beliefs and attitudes that encourage individuals to understand and exercise their rights and enhance human rights education in general.

CSO initiatives that raise awareness and tackle gender inequality are also eligible for support.

Projects funded under this Outcome must contribute to the following outcomes and to one or more of the outputs:

	Expected programme results	Indicators
Programme-level objective	Civil society and active citizenship strengthened, and vulnerable groups empowered	Number of people engaged in civil society organisation activities
Outcome 2	Increased support for human rights (and equal treatment)	Share of target group showing concern for human rights
		Share of target group favourable to gender equality
		Number of beneficiaries of services provided or improved (NB – service-provision will only be supported as part of actions addressing awareness-raising, advocacy, empowerment and reform initiatives)
		Number of national laws and policies influenced
Output 2.1	Awareness of human rights and equal treatment supported	Number of people educated about human rights by CSOs
Output 2.2	CSO human rights advocacy supported	Number of CSOs engaged in advocacy work on human rights and equal treatment
Output 2.3	Awareness raising of gender equality supported	Number of initiatives addressing gender equality
		Number of awareness raising campaigns carried out

3.3 Outcome 3: Vulnerable groups empowered

Eligible areas of support:

- *Human rights and equal treatment through combating any discrimination on the grounds of racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, gender, disability, age, sexual orientation or gender identity*
- *Social justice and inclusion of vulnerable groups*
- *Gender equality and gender-based violence*

CSOs play an important role in promoting social justice and fighting discrimination and inequalities in society. The Programme seeks to support CSOs that work to bring positive changes to the lives of marginalised groups like ethnic minorities, migrants and refugees, women, youth-at-risk, etc. That can be done through various types of empowerment activities and by giving them voice in policy issues that affect them. The Programme intends to support CSOs who advocate for the interests of marginalised groups, and who mobilize their constituency to contribute to better policies and services. The emerging social enterprise sector is encouraged to come up with innovative methods and approaches that improve the well-being of vulnerable groups. Initiatives countering hate speech, polarization and discrimination, and promoting informed public debate may also be supported.

Provision of welfare and basic services will only be supported as part of actions addressing awareness-raising, advocacy, empowerment and reform initiatives.

Projects funded under this Outcome must contribute to the following outcomes and to one or more of the outputs:

	Expected programme results	Indicators
Programme-level objective	Civil society and active citizenship strengthened, and vulnerable groups empowered	Number of people engaged in civil society organisation activities
Outcome 3	Vulnerable groups empowered	Number of vulnerable individuals reached by empowerment measures Number of beneficiaries of services provided or improved (NB – service-provision will only be supported as <u>part of actions addressing awareness-raising, advocacy, empowerment and reform initiatives</u>)
Output 3.1	Vulnerable groups consulted on policy issues affecting them	Number of CSO initiatives engaging vulnerable groups in policy issues affecting them
Output 3.2	New methods and approaches addressing the needs of vulnerable groups developed	Number of new methods to address the needs of vulnerable groups developed
Output 3.3	Counselling and support provided to victims of discrimination and other vulnerable groups	Number of CSOs providing counselling and support to victims of discrimination and human rights violations
Output 3.4	Prejudice and negative stereotypes against vulnerable groups challenged	Number of CSO initiatives supported to tackle hate speech and prejudice against vulnerable groups

3.4 Outcome 4: Enhanced capacity and sustainability of civil society

Enhanced capacity of CSOs that contributes to increased sustainability of civil society will be achieved by providing grants to CSOs that enable them to focus on their organisational capacity. This can include a variety of measures, for instance strengthening networks for joint policy and advocacy work; building skills in measuring and publicly communicating the contribution or added value of civil society and individual CSOs; improving transparency, accountability of the sector and individual

CSOs; forging partnerships with public and private sectors; diversifying funding sources to build long-term financial sustainability, etc.

Projects funded under this Outcome must contribute to the outcomes and to one or more of the outputs:

	Expected programme results	Indicators
Programme-level objective	Civil society and active citizenship strengthened, and vulnerable groups empowered	Number of people engaged in civil society organisation activities
Outcome 4	Enhanced capacity and sustainability of civil society	Number of CSOs with effective management procedures
		Number of CSOs with transparent and accountable governance procedures
		Number of CSOs using M&E system for their work
		Number of new joint initiatives conducted by CSOs with other CSOs
Output 4.1	Platforms and networks among CSOs established or sustained	Number of CSOs establishing new partnerships
Output 4.2	Monitoring and evaluation capacity of CSOs supported	Number of CSOs supported to implement impact evaluation tools

4 OPEN CALLS FOR PROPOSALS

Between 2019 and 2022 there will be altogether 5 open calls for proposals as follows¹:

4.1 2 open calls for proposals under Outcome areas 1-3 that offer two types of Strategic grants:

1. Medium-size ranging from **30,000 to 60,000** euros in all thematic areas lasting between **18 to 24 months** to allow CSOs to set long-term goals and pursue strategic work in their issue area;
2. Large grants ranging from **80,000 to 100,000** euros in all thematic areas lasting between **18 to 24 months** targeted at CSO coalitions that are formed by multiple organisations allowing the grants to potentially have an impact on sectoral basis and support sustainability and impact of civil society coalitions. To qualify for a large grant, a project must be proposed and implemented by at least 3 NGOs. Applicants must appoint one organisation as a lead applicant, the others participate as partners. The activities of the proposed project should cover different regions of the country and involve partners operating at different levels, i.e. national, regional and/or grass-roots level.

Partnerships with organisations from donor countries are encouraged and will receive additional scores in the evaluation process. Project promoters of both types will be encouraged to apply for additional measures to enhance bilateral cooperation with partners from Donor countries (details of such measures will be available at a later stage during project implementation phase).

4.2 3 open calls for proposals under Outcome 4 that offer capacity building grants:

¹ See Annex II for calls matrix

- ranging from **10,000 to 20,000** euros lasting between **12 to 18 months** targeted at CSOs working in all thematic areas and who are scaling their activities for larger impact. Relatively long-term grants will allow them to work systematically on specific capacity-related issues.

The calls for proposals are launched at least 2 months before the deadline for submitting applications. Guidelines for submitting application and other supporting materials are available at the programme website www.acf.ee. Information about the calls will be widely distributed through the OEF's and NENO's communication channels.

Application process

Applications will be submitted on an ACF-application form along with the following annexes:

- detailed budget
- partnership declarations (if the project is implemented in partnership)
- CVs of key staff
- Latest annual report of the lead applicant

Applications shall be submitted electronically via e-mail sent to acf@oef.org.ee at 23:59 Estonian time on the date of the deadline of a call at the latest.

Application forms and other supporting materials can be found at the website of the Active Citizens Fund Estonia at www.acf.ee.

5 ELIGIBLE APPLICANTS AND PARTNERS

5.1 Eligible applicants

Eligible applicants for grants under the ACF Estonia are organisations registered as Non-profit associations (Non-profit Associations Act) and Foundations (Foundations Act) in Estonia, are considered **non-governmental organisations** and thus are eligible to apply as long as they fulfil the requirements set in Section 7.1 of the Manual for Fund Operators:

- Are non-profit, being organisations that have not been created nor operate to generate personal profit. Although they may have paid staff and may engage in revenue-generating activities, they do not distribute profits to their members nor to their board. Where revenue-generating activities are undertaken, these should not represent the purpose of the NGO, but should be a means to support its mission and values
- Have members who do not have any direct commercial interest in the outcome of the work of the organisation or of its commercial activities and should not pursue the commercial or professional interests of their members. This requirement therefore excludes trade- and professional associations, where the aims and purposes of the association is to further the specific interests of its members only
- Are voluntary in nature, formed voluntarily by groups or individuals and usually involving an element of voluntary participation in the organisation
- Act in the public arena and for the public good on concerns and issues related to the wellbeing of people, groups or society as a whole
- Have some degree of formal or institutional existence, unlike informal or ad hoc groups, involving formal statutes or other governing document(s) defining their mission, objectives and scope
- Have transparent structures and elected chair/board, and are accountable to their members and donors

- Are independent of local, regional and national government and other public authorities
- Are independent of political parties and commercial organisations Political parties, religious institutions, social partners or profit-distributing cooperatives are not considered NGOs.

National Red Cross societies are considered eligible NGOs if they fulfil the above principles.

Faith-based organisations are eligible if they meet the principles identified above and if the funded activities do not directly or indirectly promote a religious doctrine, mission or proselytism related to the beliefs of a particular faith (beyond basic religious/cultural awareness raising).

Social enterprises are considered eligible if they fulfil the above criteria.

Eligible organisations can submit **one application as (lead) applicant within each call**. There is no limitation as to the number of partnerships any organisation may be involved in as project partner.

5.2 Eligible partners

Projects may be implemented in partnerships with project partners. Project partners shall be actively involved in, and effectively contributing to, the implementation of the project.

The following entities are eligible to be project partners:

- any public or private entity, commercial or non-commercial, as well as CSOs (NGOs) established as a legal person either in Estonia, other EEA grants beneficiary states, donor states (donor project partnerships) or a country outside the European Economic Areas that has a common border with Estonia;
- any international organisation or body or agency thereof;
- informal, ad-hoc and self-help organisations that are not registered legal entities in Estonia. Such organisations must however meet the requirements that they are not for personal profit, act for public good, are voluntary and non-discriminatory in nature, independent of local, regional and central government and other public authorities, and are independent of political parties, religious organisations and commercial organisations. These informal groups shall be represented by on single person, who signs the project partnership agreement on behalf of the group. An informal group cannot not be a direct recipient of the project grant. Costs related to an informal group's participation in a project as partners, can be covered by the project grant (the invoice shall be issued by a supplier to the project promoter, paid by the project promoter and recorded in the project promoter's accounting system).

Project partnerships are established through partnership agreements, using the template provided by the Fund Operator. In case of donor project partnerships, the partnership agreement shall be in English.

Sub-contracting aimed at one or several specific deliverables is not considered partnership.

6 ELIGIBILITY OF EXPENDITURES

6.1 Eligible expenditures

1. Eligible expenditures of projects are those actually incurred by the project promoter or the project partner, which meet the following criteria:
 - a) they are incurred between the first and final dates of eligibility of a project as specified in the project contract;
 - b) they are connected with the subject of the project contract and they are indicated in the detailed budget of the project;
 - c) they are proportionate and necessary for the implementation of the project;

- d) they are used for the sole purpose of achieving the objective of the project and its expected outcome(s), in a manner consistent with the principles of economy, efficiency and effectiveness;
 - e) they are identifiable and verifiable, in particular through being recorded in the accounting records of the project promoter and determined according to the applicable accounting standards and generally accepted accounting principles; and
 - f) they comply with the requirements of applicable tax and social legislation.
2. Expenditures are considered to have been incurred when the cost has been invoiced, paid and the subject matter delivered (in case of goods) or performed (in case of services and works). Exceptionally, costs in respect of which an invoice has been issued in the final month of eligibility are also deemed to be incurred within the dates of eligibility if the costs are paid within 30 days of the final date of eligibility. Overheads and depreciation of equipment are considered to have been incurred when they are recorded on the accounts of the project promoter and/or project partner.
 3. The project promoter's internal accounting and auditing procedures must permit direct reconciliation of the expenditures and revenue declared in respect of the project with the corresponding accounting statements and supporting documents.

6.2 Direct expenditures

1. The eligible direct expenditures for a project are those expenditures which are identified by the project promoter and/or the project partner, in accordance with their accounting principles and usual internal rules, as specific expenditures directly linked to the implementation of the project and which can therefore be booked to it directly. The following direct expenditures are eligible provided that they satisfy the criteria set out in Article 6.1:
 - a) the cost of personnel assigned to the project, comprising actual remuneration including social security charges and other statutory costs as applicable, provided that this corresponds to the project promoter's and project partner's usual policy on remuneration;
 - b) travel and subsistence allowances for personnel and volunteers taking part in the project, provided that they are in line with the project promoter's and project partner's usual practices on travel costs;
 - c) cost of new or second-hand equipment provided that it is depreciated in accordance with generally accepted accounting principles applicable to the project promoter and generally accepted for items of the same kind. Only the portion of the depreciation corresponding to the duration of the project and the rate of actual use for the purposes of the project may be taken into account by the Fund Operator. In case the Fund Operator determines that the equipment is an integral and necessary component for achieving the outcomes of the project, the entire purchase price of that equipment may be eligible;
 - d) costs of consumables and supplies, provided that they are identifiable and assigned to the project;
 - e) costs entailed by other contracts awarded by a project promoter for the purposes of carrying out the project, provided that the awarding complies with the applicable rules on public procurement; and
 - f) costs arising directly from requirements imposed by the project contract for each project.

2. Costs related to reconstruction, renovation, or refurbishment of a real estate shall not exceed 50% of the eligible direct cost of the project.
3. Where the entire purchase price of equipment is eligible in accordance with point (c) of paragraph 1, the project promoter shall commit to do the following:
 - a) keeps the equipment in its ownership for a period of at least five years following the completion of the project and continues to use the equipment for the benefit of the overall objectives of the project for the same period;
 - b) keeps the equipment properly insured against losses such as fire, theft or other normally insurable incidents both during project implementation and for at least five years following the completion of the project; and
 - c) sets aside appropriate resources for the maintenance of the equipment for at least five years following the completion of the project.

The specific means for the implementation of this obligation shall be specified in the project contract. The Fund Operator may release any project promoter from the above obligations with respect to any specifically identified equipment where the Fund Operator is satisfied that, having regard to all relevant circumstances, continued use of that equipment for the overall objectives of the project would serve no useful economic purpose.

6.3 Indirect costs

1. Indirect costs are all eligible costs that cannot be identified by the project promoter and/or the project partner as being directly attributed to the project, but which can be identified and justified by its accounting system as being incurred in direct relationship with the eligible direct costs attributed to the project. They may not include any eligible direct costs. Indirect costs of the project shall represent a fair apportionment of the overall overheads of the project promoter or the project partner. Project promoters and project partners may apply a flat rate of up to 15% of direct eligible personnel costs to cover these costs.
2. In case of project promoters or project partners that are international organisations, or bodies or agencies thereof, indirect costs may be identified in accordance with the relevant rules established by such organisations.

6.4 Excluded costs

The following costs shall not be considered eligible:

- a) interest on debt, debt service charges and late payment charges;
- b) charges for financial transactions and other purely financial costs, except costs related to accounts and financial services imposed by the project contract;
- c) costs related to purchase of land or real estate;
- d) provisions for losses or potential future liabilities;
- e) exchange losses;
- f) recoverable VAT;
- g) costs that are covered by other sources;
- h) fines, penalties and costs of litigation, except where litigation is an integral and necessary component for achieving the outcomes of the project; and
- i) excessive or reckless expenditure.

6.5 Grant rate and co-financing

1. The grant rate is up to 90% of eligible expenditures of the project.

2. The co-financing shall be provided in the form of cash or in-kind contribution in the form of voluntary work. For medium-size and large grants under Outcomes 1-3 (ranging between 30 000 – 60 000 EUR and 80 000 – 100 000 EUR) in-kind contribution may constitute up to 50% of the co-financing required for the project. For small capacity building grants under Outcome 4, such in-kind contribution may constitute up to 100% of the co-financing required for the project.
3. The in-kind contribution may be provided only by the project promoter and/or any NGO acting as a project partner(s).
4. Depending on the character of delivered work, the price of in-kind contribution in the form of voluntary work will be between the latest quarterly minimum and average gross hourly wage in Estonia, including the employer's social contribution as available at the time of the announcement of calls by the Statistics Estonia. The Fund Operator will announce the applicable prices during the launch of each call. Such prices will remain in effect during the lifecycle of projects financed within each call.

7 SELECTION PROCESS

Selection of the projects is carried out in four stages:

- Compliance with administrative and eligibility criteria;
- Evaluation by independent experts;
- Selection Committee review;
- The Board of the Open Estonia Foundation will make the final decision on which projects are selected for funding.

The entire selection process will take approximately 2 months.

7.1 Administrative and eligibility check

Administrative criteria include the following:

- The ACF project application together with annexes has been submitted by the deadline, i.e. the date and time as published in the call;
- The project application is signed by an authorized person.

Non-compliance with any of the above criteria will lead to the automatic rejection of the project proposal. The respective applicant is notified of non-compliance within 5 working days.

Eligibility criteria include the following:

- The applicant is an NGO, registered in Estonia, in line with the definition provided above;
- Project partners are CSOs, or any other public or private entities established in Estonia, any other Beneficiary States, Donor States or Russia (i.e. a country outside the European Economic Area that has a common border with Estonia), or any international organisation or body or agency thereof. Informal groups that are not registered legal entities in Estonia are also eligible as partners.
- The requested grant amount and grant rate is within permissible limits as published in the call;
- The proposed implementation period is within permissible limits as published in the call;
- The (lead) applicant has submitted one project application per call in question.

The OEF may ask for additional information from the applicant in case of doubt whether any of the eligibility criteria above have been met.

In case of clerical mistakes in the project application, annexes or missing accompanying documents, detected during the administrative or eligibility check, the applicant is given 3 working days to correct the mistakes and re-submit the document(s) in question. After re-submission of the document(s) the administrative and/or eligibility check is repeated.

Once the administrative and eligibility review has been completed, the applicants whose project applications have been rejected are notified of the decision of the OEF and are informed of the reasons for the rejection. In case the applicants are not satisfied with the explanation provided by the OEF, they may submit an appeal within 5 working days to the Complaints Committee established by the Fund Operator.

7.2 Evaluation of project applications by independent experts

Each application is reviewed independently and separately by two experts according to the evaluation criteria that will be published in the calls for proposals.

The average scores awarded by the experts are used to establish the ranking list of project applications. A minimum score of the project application needed to be recommendable for funding is 70 (out of 100).

In case the difference between the scores given by the two experts is more than 30% of the higher score, the application is reviewed by the third expert. If the score given by a third expert would not in any way result in the support of the project, the third expert will not be commissioned.

The Fund Operator may organise a discussion meeting after the independent scoring of applications has been completed and the ranking list based on experts' scores has been established if it sees the need to clarify the comments provided by independent experts and to ensure the consistency and alignment of scoring with the criteria published in the call. Independent experts may change their scores as a result of discussion meetings; such changes will be recorded.

Evaluation criteria for evaluating project applications can be found in Annex I.

7.3 Selection committee

The Selection Committee will review the ranked list of project applications and make recommendations to the Fund Operator which projects should be funded, which should be rejected, and which shall be left on the reserve list if some of the selected project promoters may fail to launch the project. The Selection Committee will follow the rules of procedure proposed by the Fund Operator which define the methods and situations how and when modifications to the ranking of projects are justified and how these modifications will be documented. Modifications in the ranking of project applications are allowed in justified cases and in transparent manner which will be documented in the minutes of the Selection Committee meeting. They may also propose changes to individual projects' budget or approve a project application with additional conditions.

The selection committee will consist of five members who have experience or expertise of working on or with civil society. One member of the Selection Committee comes from among the members of the Board of the Open Estonia Foundation, the others will be external to the Fund Operator. The FMO, representative of the National Focal Point and the Royal Norwegian Embassy will be invited as observers to the meetings of the Selection Committee.

7.4 Final selection of projects by the Board of the OEF

The recommendations of the Selection Committee will be submitted to the Board of the Open Estonia Foundation who has the responsibility to approve the selection of projects to be funded. The Board may modify the decision of the Selection Committee in justified cases. Applicants are informed of such modifications if applicable. The decision of the Board of the Open Estonia Foundation is final and will not be subject to dispute.

7.5 Notifying of the results of the selection process

Applicants are notified by e-mail about approval or rejection of their application within one week after the decision of the Board of the Open Estonia Foundation.

Unsuccessful applicants are provided with feedback of the reasons for not approving their project for funding.

If the rejection of a project application was the result of a modification by the Selection Committee or the Board of the Open Estonia Foundation, such a justification will be provided.

8 CONTRACTING AND MONITORING OF PROJECTS

A project contract will be concluded between the OEF and the project promoter for each approved project. The project contract will set out the terms and conditions of grant assistance and the roles and responsibilities of the parties.

An inseparable annex to the project contract will be the current Guidelines for Applicants and Project Promoters, including the list of eligible and ineligible expenditure.

If a project is implemented in partnership, the PP will sign a partnership agreement with each of the project partners according to the template provided by the OEF. The partnership agreement will detail the roles and responsibilities of each partner. The partnership agreements shall be submitted to the OEF prior to the signing of the project contract who will verify that the agreements comply with the Programme requirements. For project involving entities from the donor states, an English-language partnership agreement template will be used.

Payments to projects

There will be 3 types of payments:

1. Advance payment

Advance payment up to the amount of 15 - 25%, depending on the size of the grant, is made to a project promoter within 10 working days after signing of the project contract.

2. Interim payments

Project promoters are responsible for planning of their cash flows and submitting of payment requests to the OEF. Interim payment requests will be submitted together with interim reports and shall be released after the interim report has been approved by the OEF. PP is entitled to submit interim payment request once it has depleted 50% of previous advance and interim payments. In justified cases PPs may ask for an exception. PP is entitled to receive up to 90% of the grant amount stipulated in the project contract in the form of advance and interim payments. 10% of the grant amount stipulated in the contract shall be retained until the OEF has approved the final report of the project.

3. Payments on the final balance

The payment on the final balance will be made within 10 working days after both the narrative and financial report have been approved by the OEF. In case the project is subject to an audit, the final payment will be released after potential issues raised by the audit have been resolved and the audit report has been approved by the OEF.

In exceptional cases where projects have been assessed as posing a high risk for the programme, the FO may make a justified decision to change the payments scheme (reducing pre-financing or applying a scheme without pre-financing under which the FO reimburses project promoters only the amount of grant expenses verified by the FO).

Reporting from project promoters

The contracts with PPs list obligations and deadlines for submitting Interim and Final Reports.

Interim reports will be submitted after every 4 months. After month 4 all PPs will submit a full interim report. Full interim report consists of:

- narrative report;
- financial report;
- copies of supporting documents, including all invoices, receipts, contracts, time-sheets, other accounting documents and proof of payments.

In case of purchase of fixed assets, invoices, insurance documents and depreciation calculation are also required.

In case of purchase of goods or services in an amount of 5000 EUR or higher, 3 offers must be submitted as well.

All reporting formats are published on the website of the OEF.

As a rule, full interim reports are also required at project mid-term and at project completion. At other times, a simplified interim report is submitted, which consists of:

- narrative report;
- financial report;
- a schedule of individual expenditure items and proof of payment.

In case of simplified interim reports, Project Promoters are later asked to submit a sample of supporting documents specified by the OEF separately in each case.

If the term of the project is short, e.g. 12 months, PPs may be allowed to submit a simplified interim report at project mid-term.

The OEF will establish a monitoring system to be able to periodically report on Programme's outputs and outcomes. PPs are required to submit relevant data with each interim report. The format for gathering and submitting such data will be provided by the OEF.

Final Project Report is submitted within 30 days of a project end-date.

9 PUBLICITY

9.1 Developing a communication plan

Applicants shall include a communication plan in their project application, with the aim of creating awareness of the existence, the objectives, any bilateral cooperation with entities in Iceland, Liechtenstein and/or Norway, the implementation, results and the impact of support from the Donors to the project.

The communication plan shall include at least the following:

- the aims and target groups, including stakeholders on national, regional and/or local levels and the general public
- the strategy and content of the information and communication measures, including activities, communication tools and timeframe, having regard to the added value and impact of the funding from the Donors
- at least two information activities on progress, achievements and results in the project, such as a seminar or a conference with stakeholders, a press conference or press event, including a launch activity and/or a closing activity for the project. For projects whose grant size is less than EUR 50 000, one information activity is sufficient and can be of smaller scale

- measures for making information on the project available on the web both in Estonian and English either through a dedicated website or through a dedicated webpage on the organisation's existing website with linking between the pages. The information of the project must be regularly updated in Estonian.
- information on the web shall include information about the project, its progress, achievements and results, the cooperation with entities in Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway, relevant photos, contact information and a clear reference to the Programme and the EEA and Norway Grants
- information on the administrative departments or bodies responsible for implementation of the information and communication measures, including a contact person
- an indication of how the information and communication measures are to be evaluated in terms of visibility and awareness of the project its objectives and impact, and the Donors.

9.2 Implementation of the communication plan

The project promoter provides information on the project to the widest possible audience at the appropriate national, regional and/or local levels. The Project Promoter develops and implements the Communication Plan as described above. The project promoter reports to the OEF on information and communication obligations.

The project promoter ensures that those taking part in the project have been informed of the Programme's funding.

10 COMPLAINTS AND APPEALS

The Fund Operator will establish the Complaints Committee with the objective of:

- To provide an accessible, transparent and consistent mechanism for complainants to express concerns regarding a supposed occurrence of mismanagement
- To assess each complaint submitted to it in a timely and effective manner
- To provide guidance and recommendations regarding follow-up, and
- To report back to the complainant on corrective actions when applicable to resolve any assumed incidents of mismanagement.

The Complaints Committee will assess whether the decisions taken by the FO adhere to the principles of good governance and rules and procedures established for the management of the ACF. It will not assess any concrete project applications, change the scores of independent evaluators nor change the decisions made by the Selection Committee and the Board of the Open Estonia Foundation regarding the allocation of grants.

The Complaints Committee will consist of three members: Programme Manager of the Fund Operator, member of the Executive Board of the Fund Operator and an independent expert, external to the Fund Operator. Programme staff responsible for assessing the particular project application or monitoring the particular project in question shall be excluded from the Complaints Committee.

All complaints and alerts related to the implementation of the Programme will be first considered by the Fund Operator. In case a person who submitted a complaint or an alert is not satisfied with the response, he or she has a right to refer the case to the Complaints Committee who will assess the complaint and conclude on the case.

Information on how to submit complaints is available on [the website](#) of the Fund Operator.

11 QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Questions should be sent to the OEF no later than five working days before the deadline for the submission of applications. The questions must be sent by email to acf@oef.org.ee indicating in the subject line the organisation's name.

Questions and answers will be published on the Active Citizens Fund Estonia website. No reference will be made to the name of the organisation who submitted the concrete question. It is therefore advisable to consult the website regularly.

To ensure equal treatment of bidders, the OEF cannot give a prior opinion on the eligibility of applicants, an action or specific activities.

ANNEX I

Evaluation criteria for project applications

Strategic grants

Evaluation criteria	Maximum score
1. Relevance of the project to the Programme's objectives	20
Relevance of the project to Programme's objectives and thematic areas of support	10
Relevance of the project to the Programme's expected outcomes and outputs	10
2. Methodology	20
Coherence of the project – analysis of the problem area and the needs of target groups, appropriateness of the intervention	10
Activity plan – is it clear, practicable and sufficient to reach the desired outcomes	10
3. Impact	15
Impact on problem area – impact on target groups and end beneficiaries, impact on public attitudes and / or policies, etc	15
4. Experience and capacity of the applicant	15
Resources available for project implementation – knowledge and capacity of the project team, financial and other resources available for project implementation	10
Partnership and cooperation – are partners involved in project implementation? Is the choice of partners substantiated and has impact on the effectiveness of the project?	5
5. Sustainability	10
Sustainability of expected results – will there be a structure in place to continue with the activities? Will there be changes to legislation or introduction of new approaches, codes of conduct, etc?	5
Multiplication of project results – will the results of the project be valuable to society at large, and/or are usable by other parties at a later stage?	5
6. Budget	10
Expenditures are substantiated and necessary for the project	5
Value for money	5

7. Communication	5
Is the communication plan sufficient to ensure the transparency and accountability in project implementation and inform the public of its progress and results?	5
8. Added value of partnerships	5
Partners from donor countries have been engaged to the project (donor partnership project) and the choice of partners is substantiated and has impact on the effectiveness of the project	3
Representatives of national minorities are engaged to the project and their choice is substantiated and has impact on project effectiveness	2
Total	100

ANNEX II

Call # 1

Call for projects by civil society organisations (CSOs) that fall under the following objectives:

1. Strengthened democratic culture and civic awareness
2. Increased support for human rights
3. Vulnerable groups empowered

The total amount available through the Call is EUR 1,100,000.

	Amount available	Size of grants	Project duration	Eligible support areas
Outcome 1 Strengthened democratic culture and civic awareness				Democracy, active citizenship, good governance and transparency Environment and climate change
Medium size strategic grants	EUR 470,000	EUR 30,000 – 60,000	18 – 24 months	
Large strategic grants ²		EUR 80,000 – 100,000		
Outcome 2 Increased support for human rights				Human rights and equal treatment Social justice and inclusion of vulnerable groups Gender equality and gender-based violence
Medium size strategic grants	EUR 420,000	EUR 30,000 – 60,000	18 – 24 months	
Large strategic grants		EUR 80,000 – 100,000		
Outcome 3 Vulnerable groups empowered				Human rights and equal treatment Social justice and inclusion of vulnerable groups Gender equality and gender-based violence
Medium size strategic grants	EUR 210,000	EUR 30,000 – 60,000	18 – 24 months	
Large strategic grants		EUR 80,000 – 100,000		

Call # 2

Call for projects by civil society organisations (CSOs) that contribute to capacity development and sustainability of civil society sector, including NGOs.

The total amount available through the call is EUR 250,000.

	Amount available	Size of grants	Project duration	Eligible support areas
	EUR 250,000			

² In case of large strategic (network) grants, an application has to be submitted and the project implemented by a coalition of CSOs.

Outcome 4 Enhanced capacity and sustainability of civil society		EUR 10,000 – 20,000	12 – 18 months	All five areas of support
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Call # 3

Call for projects by civil society organisations (CSOs) that fall under the following objectives:

1. Strengthened democratic culture and civic awareness
2. Increased support for human rights
3. Vulnerable groups empowered

The total amount available through the Call is EUR 1,250,000.

	Amount available EUR 1,250,000	Size of grants	Project duration	Eligible support areas
Outcome 1 Strengthened democratic culture and civic awareness				Democracy, active citizenship, good governance and transparency Environment and climate change
Medium size strategic grants	EUR 530,000	EUR 30,000 – 60,000	18 – 24 months	
Large strategic grants		EUR 80,000 – 100,000		
Outcome 2 Increased support for human rights				Human rights and equal treatment Social justice and inclusion of vulnerable groups Gender equality and gender-based violence
Medium size strategic grants	EUR 480,000	EUR 30,000 – 60,000	18 – 24 months	
Large strategic grants		EUR 80,000 – 100,000		
Outcome 3 Vulnerable groups empowered				Human rights and equal treatment Social justice and inclusion of vulnerable groups Gender equality and gender-based violence
Medium size strategic grants	EUR 240,000	EUR 30,000 – 60,000	18 – 24 months	
Large strategic grants		EUR 80,000 – 100,000		

Call # 4

Call for projects by civil society organisations (CSOs) that contribute to capacity development and sustainability of civil society sector, including NGOs.

The total amount available through the call is EUR 250,000.

	Amount available	Size of grants	Project duration	Eligible support areas
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	EUR 250,000			
Outcome 4 Enhanced capacity and sustainability of civil society		EUR 10,000 – 20,000	12 – 18 months	All five areas of support

Call # 5

Call for projects by civil society organisations (CSOs) that contribute to capacity development and sustainability of civil society sector, including NGOs.

The total amount available through the call is EUR 200,000.

	Amount available EUR 200,000	Size of grants	Project duration	Eligible support areas
Outcome 4 Enhanced capacity and sustainability of civil society		EUR 10,000 – 20,000	12 – 18 months	All five areas of support