

Active Citizens Fund – Estonia

Guidelines for Applicants and Project Promoters of Institutional Grants

1 BACKGROUND

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 2024 a total of 6 million EUR will be available for Estonian CSOs through open calls for proposals and other support activities. The Programme will be implemented by way of 7 open calls for proposals and 1 pre-defined project. In addition, there will be activities aimed at capacity building during project preparation and project implementation phases conducted by consortium partner NENO.

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 is based on the common values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities.

2 OPEN CALL FOR INSTITUTIONAL GRANTS

The aim of the Open Call for Institutional Grants is to support medium-sized advocacy and watchdog organisations (NGOs) in selected areas of support in achieving their strategic objectives while also focussing on capacity building and sustainability.

The total budget of the call is EUR 500,000. It is foreseen that the Fund Operator will support a total of 5 organisations in the maximum amount of EUR 100,000 during the period of 24 months:

Expected outcome	Indicative budget per outcome
<i>Strengthened democratic culture and civic awareness</i>	EUR 300,000
<i>Increased support for human rights (and equal treatment)</i>	EUR 200,000

2.1 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.

Additional criteria of eligibility of applicants under the Call for Institutional Grants

Eligible applicants must:

- have a legal personality for at least 60 months before the day of the deadline for submitting applications (this will be checked against the records of the Estonian e-Business Register); and
- have an average annual turnover between EUR 100,000 – 500,000 for the 2019 and 2020 fiscal years (the applicant will prove this by submitting annual reports in question); and
- have core activities in one of the following areas of support:
 - Strengthened democratic culture and civic awareness;
 - Increased support for human rights (and equal treatment).
- have multi-year organisational workplan or strategy that includes advocacy and watchdog activities; and
- have transparent operating structure, which, as a minimum means that the organisation’s website provides the public with transparent information on:
 - organisation’s annual reports (for at least the last three years);
 - names of the representatives of organisation’s governing and executive bodies;
 - current information on organisation’s activities.

Recipients of institutional grants are ineligible to apply for future ACF EE grants.

2.2 Eligible core activities

Applicant’s core activities and multi-year organisational workplan or strategy must be consistent and significantly linked with the Outcomes 1 or 2 (and objectives) of the Active Citizens Fund Estonia. However, it is not necessary for strategies or workplans to follow only these outcomes and outputs.

Outcome 1: Strengthened democratic culture and civic awareness

	Expected programme results	Indicators
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

Clarification:

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.

Outcome 2: Increased support for human rights (and equal treatment)

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
		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

Clarification:

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.

Outcome 4: Enhanced capacity and sustainability of CSOs

Capacity building is an integral part of institutional grants. Applicants should in their multi-annual organisational strategy and/or workplan, alongside the objectives targeting the above outcomes,

address also the objectives targeting their capacities. Applicants are required to elaborate their capacity building objectives in the application form. Final capacity building plan will be agreed in cooperation with the Fund Operator. It is expected that approximately 10% on the overall ACF grant shall be earmarked for capacity building activities. It is advisable to engage external experts into development and implementation of capacity building plan.

2.3 Financial provisions of the Call for Institutional Grants

1. Budget of the call and period of support

Total budget of the call is EUR 500 000. The selected organisations will receive a grant in the maximum amount of EUR 100 000 for the duration of 24 months. It is foreseen that 5 organisations will be supported. The funding period shall be January 1, 2022, through December 31, 2023. Decisions will be made approximately early March 2022, funding will be allocated retroactively from January 1, 2022.

2. Eligible expenditure

The Project Promoter (PP) receives the grant as a lump sum. The PP does not need to provide financial reports on the specific expenditure made under the grant. Payments of the grant do not depend on specific and individual expenditure incurred by the PP.

An applicant will have to submit a two-year institutional budget including the grant amount to allow the Fund Operator to assess the grant's potential impact. The institutional budget including the grant should be proportionate and necessary in relation to the implementation of annual organisational strategy and/or workplan and capacity building activities, thus ensuring the optimal use of resources.

PP will need to keep detailed account of expenditure according to the accounting standards and generally accepted accounting principles. Project Promoter shall provide an assurance report by an external auditor at the end of the funding period. This report shall provide an assurance that the Project Promoter has used the grant in accordance with the purpose and provisions of the grant agreement. If the PP commissions annual audit reports for other purposes the report of the latest year of the grant implementation may be provided instead, provided that it covers and specifically mentions the Norway Grants contribution.

3. Reporting and payments

When reporting on results, the PP will need to be able to demonstrate that its activities have contributed to ACF's Outcomes 1 or/and 2 and the indicators they achieved. They will be required to report on the indicators that correspond to the focus of their work plan/strategy at outcome level, but not at output level.

Progress will be assessed against the multi-year organisational strategy/work plan and its budget at the end of each implementation year. However, the Fund Operator can request for additional information on implementation progress at any time. The FO and [Financial Mechanism Office](#) have the right to commission audits of the entire organisational accounts.

The PP does not need to provide financial reports on the specific expenditure made under the grant. Payments of the grant do not depend on specific and individual expenditure incurred by the PP. The costs are considered as incurred within the grant once paid to the PP.

In case the information provided by the PP proves evident non-satisfactory performance, or the strategy/work plan is not implemented in line with the principles set in Article 1.4 of the Programme

Implementation Agreement¹, the grant paid to the PP may be cancelled or reduced proportionately. Relevant provisions in this respect shall be included in the project contract.

Funding will be paid out in 3 instalments: the 1st advance payment of 50% of the grant within 10 working days after signing the contract; interim payment of 40% of the grant after the approval of 1st annual report, and final payment of 10% of the grant after the approval of the final report.

The Project Promoters shall report to the Fund Operator on the use of the grant as follows:

- Semi-annual narrative report on the progress in the first 6 months by July 31, 2022;
- Annual report on the progress in the first 12 months by February 28, 2023. Annual report consists of the following:
 - An assessment of PP’s performance in the previous calendar year on the results achieved in relation to the project application (i.e. consistency with ACF’s Outcomes and capacity building plan submitted along with the application);
 - Up-to-date multi-annual organisational strategy/workplan, indicating:
 - which tasks, objectives and results contained therein have been implemented/achieved by the use of ACF funding allocated in the previous calendar year;
 - for which tasks, objectives, and results ACF funding is intended to be used in the current year.
 - Previous year balance sheet and statement of revenues and expenses (an official annual financial report shall be submitted by June 30, 2022 at the latest)
- Final report on the progress by February 28, 2024. The final report consists of the following:
 - An assessment of PP’s performance in the previous calendar year on the results achieved in relation to the project application (i.e. consistency with ACF’s Outcomes and capacity building plan submitted along with the application);
 - Up-to-date multi-annual organisational strategy/workplan, indicating which tasks, objectives and results contained therein have been implemented/achieved by the use of ACF funding during the entire funding period;
 - Previous year balance sheet and statement of revenues and expenses (an official annual financial report shall be submitted by June 30, 2024 at the latest);
 - An assurance report by an external auditor (if the PP commissions annual audit reports for other purposes the report of the latest year of the grant implementation may be provided instead, provided that it covers and specifically mentions the Norway Grants contribution).

Annual and final report will be approved only after an individual annual evaluation meeting of the Fund Operator with the Project Promoter.

2.4 Informing the public

Project promoters are obliged to inform the public on receiving the grant from ACF.

¹ 1. The Programme shall be based on the common values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities.
2. The Programme shall follow the principles of good governance; it shall be participatory and inclusive, accountable, transparent, responsive, effective and efficient. There shall be zero-tolerance towards corruption.
3. The Programme shall be consistent with sustainable development, long-term economic growth, social cohesion and environmental protection.
4. The Programme shall follow a results and risk management approach.

3 APPLICATION PROCESS

Applications must be submitted on designated application forms in accordance with the instructions.

A complete application consists of the following documents:

- A completed application form (word or pdf);
- A completed 2-year organisational budget (excel);
- Organisation's multi-annual strategy and/or work plan;
- Annual reports of 2019 and 2020 fiscal years submitted to the Business Registry (or link to these annual reports at the last page of the application form);
- CV's on key personnel.

Deadline for submitting applications is **January 18, 2022**. Complete applications should be submitted in the Estonian language electronically via e-mail sent to acf@oef.org.ee by 23:59 Estonian time on the date of the deadline of the call. All documents must be in one digital container signed by an authorized person.

4 SELECTION PROCESS

Selection process consists of four stages:

- Compliance with administrative and eligibility criteria
- Evaluation of applications by independent experts
- Selection Committee review and recommendations to the Board of Open Estonia Foundation
- 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.

4.1 Administrative and eligibility check

Administrative criteria include the following:

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

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

Eligibility criteria include the following:

- The applicant meets eligibility criteria of Art. 2.1 "Eligible applicants" and "Additional criteria of eligibility of applicants under the Call for Institutional Grants":

1.	Applicant meets the eligibility criteria as described in Art. 21	Yes/no
2.	The applicant has legal personality of at least 60 months before the day of deadline of submitting applications	Yes/no
3.	The applicant's annual turnover in 2019 and 2020 is between EUR 100,000 and 500,000	Yes/no
4.	The applicant has core activities in the following areas of support: <ul style="list-style-type: none">– Strengthened democratic culture and civic awareness; and/or– Increased support for human rights (and equal treatment)	Yes/no

5.	Multi-year strategy and/or workplan includes advocacy and watchdog activities	Yes/no
6.	The applicant has open and transparent management structure	Yes/no

If an applicant does not meet any of these requirements, the application is rejected without further evaluation. Applicants whose applications have been rejected, may submit an appeal within 5 working days to the Complaints Committee established by the Fund Operator.

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 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.

4.2 Evaluation of applications by independent experts

Each application is reviewed independently and separately by two experts against the evaluation criteria described below.

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 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).

Evaluation criteria of institutional grants (maximum score 100)

<i>Quality of the multi-annual strategy or/and workplan</i>	<i>/20</i>
To what extent does the multi-annual strategy and/or workplan identify clear and measurable objectives (results), indicators and targets?	/10
Potential impact of the grant in bringing about long-term and systemic change / prospective results of the grant	/10
<i>Relevance of the multi-annual strategy or/and workplan</i>	<i>/20</i>
To what extent is the multi-annual strategy or/and workplan relevant for ACF (to what extent does it target ACF's results framework)	/10
To what extent is the multi-annual strategy and/or workplan relevant to the mission and general strategy of the applicant	/5
To what extent does the applicant engage in advocacy and watchdog activities based on the multi-annual strategy and/or workplan	/5

<i>Experience of the applicant</i>	<i>/30</i>
To what extent does the applicant have appropriate organisational capacity and sufficient human resources to implement the multi-annual strategy and/or workplan and capacity building plan	/15
To what extent is the applicant legitimate advocate of its stakeholders (level and quality of engagement of stakeholders into policy issues affecting them)	/10
To what extent has the applicant monitoring and evaluation framework in place, does it engage in impact assessment	/5
<i>Financial viability</i>	<i>/15</i>
To what extent does the applicant demonstrate sufficient and diverse financial resources of funding to maintain its activity throughout the grant duration	/5
To what extent does the organisational budget appear proportionate and necessary for the implementation of the multi-annual organisational strategy and/or workplan, ensuring the optimal use of resources	/5
To what extent is applicant's general budget identifiable and verifiable, in particular through being recorded in the accounting standards and generally accepted accounting standards and complies with the requirements of applicable tax and social legislation	/5
<i>Transparency</i>	<i>/10</i>
Does the applicant publish members of its governing structures, annual reports, activities and results on its web site	/10
<i>Capacity building plan</i>	<i>/5</i>
To what extent is the capacity building plan sound and based on organisational assessment	/5

4.3 Selection committee

The Selection Committee will review the ranked list of 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.

4.4 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.

4.5 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.

5 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.

6 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.

7 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.