

Programme
Active Citizens Fund – Slovakia

3rd Open Call for Proposals

Outcome 2
Strengthened civil society advocacy and watchdog role

Call code: 02 – 3

Announcement of the call: 26 January 2021
Deadline for submission of project applications: 29 April 2021, 23:59 (CET)

Call published by Fund Operator: Open Society Foundation

1. Introduction

This call for proposals on projects aiming to increase citizen participation in civic activities is a part of the implementation of the programme Active Citizens Fund – Slovakia (ACF – Slovakia or programme).

The ACF – Slovakia supports Slovak civic organizations in engaging citizens in decision-making and public policy making, in efforts to create better conditions for good governance, protect human rights and provide civic education and improve the position of vulnerable groups in society. Particular attention is paid to young people and their participation in public affairs.

The horizontal priorities of the programme are to support bilateral co-operation between Slovak organizations and partners from the donor countries and to develop capacities as well as to improve the position of civic organizations in society.

ACF – Slovakia supports projects of civic organisations through open calls in the following outcomes:

1. Increased citizen participation in civic activities;
2. Strengthened civil society advocacy and watchdog role;
3. Increased support for human rights and civic education;
4. Vulnerable groups empowered;
5. Enhanced capacity and sustainability of civil society.

The programme shall also address two the country-specific concerns:

- Improving outreach to under-served geographic areas and target groups
- Empowerment and inclusion of minorities including Roma

The general, non-exhaustive list of the types of activities eligible under the grants:

- 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 NGOs;
- Partnerships between NGOs, 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.

In the period 2018 – 2023, the ACF – Slovakia will allocate 8.540 million¹ EUR in 19 open grant calls for projects of civic society organizations (CSO) and will provide other support activities, training in project management, organizational development and self-financing.

The ACF – Slovakia is part of Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway's contribution to reducing social and economic disparities and strengthen bilateral cooperation with 15 Member States of the European Union. The programme is managed by the Ekopolis Foundation in partnership with the Open Society Foundation and the Carpathian Foundation.

The information on the ACF – Slovakia is available at www.acfslovakia.sk.

The information on the EEA and Norway Grants is available at www.eeagrants.org.

2. Focus of the call

The overall objective of the ACF programme is 'Civil society and active citizenship strengthened and vulnerable groups empowered'.

Rise of extremism and intolerance, growing impact of disinformation on people's opinion, state capture and wasteful use of public funds have been topics dominating public discourse since the last parliamentary elections in March of 2016. The support of ACF resources for CSOs, who play crucial role in advocacy, watchdog and policy monitoring is thus coming in a very timely manner.

The Programme will encourage CSOs to actively contribute to development of national, regional and local public policies using evidence based approach. Their effort should improve the quality of policies under consideration as well as fill-in the gaps where the government follows its own interests, is absent or performs poorly. CSOs should also complement the role of independent media, provide feedback and critical reflection on the way public affairs are governed.

The Programme is intended to encourage innovation and advocacy work contributing to more effective public participation, judiciary reform, environmental protection and inclusion of vulnerable groups. The results should be demonstrated in new policies, public decisions and regulations adopted during the Programme period.

Specifically this call is focused to achieve the following results and their indicators:

¹ The amount includes allocation for the Bilateral Fund and allocation for the Pre-defined project Development and use of life competences of young people

Expected programme results	Indicator	Guidance for applicants
Programme Objective – Civil society and active citizenship strengthened and vulnerable groups empowered	Programme-level Indicator Number of people engaged in civil society organisation activities	All projects will report against this indicator
Outcome 2 Strengthened civil society advocacy and watchdog role	<i>Outcome 2 Indicator [a]</i> Number of CSOs using evidence / research to support their advocacy and policy work	
	<i>Outcome 2 Indicator [b]</i> Number of initiatives successful in obtaining information on public / private decision making	
	<i>Outcome 2 Indicator [c]</i> Number of local / regional policies and laws influenced by CSO input	
	<i>Outcome 2 Indicator [d]</i> Number of national policies and laws influenced by CSO input	
Output 2.1 Policy input submitted by CSOs	Output 2.1 Indicator Number of CSO policy submissions aimed at influencing policies, legal regulations and public decisions	All projects contributing to this output indicator will also report against the Outcome 2 (Strengthened civil society advocacy and watchdog role) Indicators [a], [b], [c] and [d]
Output 2.2 Good governance and transparency fostered	Output 2.2 Indicator 1 Number of CSO campaigns focused on good governance and transparency carried out	All projects contributing to this output indicator will also report against the Outcome 2 (Strengthened civil society advocacy and watchdog role) Indicators [a], [b], [c] and [d]
	Output 2.2 Indicator 2 Number of CSOs engaged in monitoring the application of provisions on access to information	All projects contributing to this output indicator will also report against the Outcome 2 (Strengthened civil society advocacy and watchdog role) Indicators [a], [b], [c] and [d]
	Output 2.2 Indicator 3 Number of legal actions on good governance and transparency filed by CSOs	All projects contributing to this output indicator will also report against the Outcome 2 (Strengthened civil society advocacy and watchdog role) Indicators [a], [b], [c] and [d]

<p><i>Output 2.3</i></p> <p>Research conducted to inform public policy decision-making and debate</p>	<p><i>Output 2.3 Indicator</i></p> <p>Number of CSOs supported to conduct research informing their advocacy</p>	<p>All projects contributing to this output indicator will also report against the Outcome 2 (Strengthened civil society advocacy and watchdog role) Indicators [a], [b], [c] and [d]</p>
<p>Outcome 1</p> <p>Increased citizen participation in civic activities</p>	<p><i>Outcome 1 Indicator [a]</i></p> <p>Number of people participating in consultations with a public decision-making body</p>	
<p><i>Output 1.2</i></p> <p>Physical and virtual spaces for public civic participation created or upgraded</p>	<p><i>Output 1.2 Indicator 2</i></p> <p>Number of virtual platforms created or supported for civic participation</p>	<p>All projects contributing to this output indicator will also report against the Outcome 1 (Increased citizen participation in civic activities) Indicator [b]</p>

For guidance on the outcomes, outputs and indicators applicable for ACF Slovakia, please refer to the *ACF – Slovakia Guidelines for Applicants and Project Promoters*.

In addition to the indicators set out in the programme, applicants may add and report upon additional relevant indicators at their own discretion.

3. Administrative and eligibility criteria

3.1. Project application administrative criteria

A project application must meet the following administrative criteria:

- the project application was submitted in electronic format in the online grant system
- the project application was submitted within the deadline of this call;
- the project application is the first project application registered on the basis of submission date and hour and submitted by the same applicant in any of the five outcomes within one round of calls for proposals with same deadline (for more details see the section 3.5 of this call);
- the project application includes annexes requested in the call.

3.2. Eligible project application

An eligible project application must meet the following criteria:

- requested sum corresponds with the terms set in the section 3.6 of this call for proposals;
- project implementation duration corresponds with the terms stated in the section 3.7 of this call for proposals.

3.3. Eligible applicants

Applicants eligible to carry out and implement projects are non-governmental organisations (NGOs). An NGO is a legal entity in the Slovak Republic, having a non-commercial purpose, independent of local, regional and central government, public entities, political parties and commercial organisations. NGOs are voluntary in nature, formed voluntarily by groups or individuals and usually involving an element of voluntary participation in the organisation.

An eligible applicant is registered in the Slovak Republic in one of the following categories:

- a) Civic Association according the Act No. 83/1990 Coll. on the Association of Citizens;
- b) Foundation according the Act No. 34/2002 Coll. on Foundations;
- c) Non-profit Organisation Providing Public Beneficial Services according the Act No. 83/1990 Coll.
- d) Non-investment Fund according the Act No. 34/2002 Coll. on Non-investment Funds;
- e) Non-profit Organisation according the Act No. 116/85 Coll. on terms for activities of organisations with international aspect;
- f) Association of Legal Entities under the Act No. 40/1964 Coll. on Civil Code;
- g) Slovak Red Cross under the Act No. 460/2007 Coll. on the Slovak Red Cross.

Political parties, religious organisations, social partners, profit distributing cooperatives, informal and ad-hoc groups and individuals are not eligible applicants.

Organizations that have not recovered amounts due, following a final court decision in connection with the NGO Programmes 2009 – 2014 in Slovakia, shall not be considered eligible applicants and/or project partners.

3.4. Eligible project partners

Projects may be implemented in partnership with project partners. Project partners share a common economic or social goal with the project promoter, which is to be realised through the implementation of the project. The purpose of creating a partnership is to ensure close co-operation between different types of organizations with different experience in solving the issues in the field. 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:

- a) Any public or private entity, commercial or non-commercial, as well as non-governmental organisations established as a legal person either in the donor states (donor project partnership), beneficiary states² or a country outside the European Economic Area that has a common border with Slovakia;
- b) Any international organisation or body or agency thereof;
- c) Informal, ad hoc and self-help organisations (including grassroots organisations) that are not registered legal entities in Slovakia (informal groups). 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 national government and other public authorities, and are independent of political parties, religious institutions and commercial organisations. These informal groups shall be represented by one 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.

² Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway

Applicants may participate in the partnership with **up to two other partners**.

Further requirements for partners' participation in the project:

- participation of project partners is irreplaceable, without partnership it would not be possible to implement the project properly and meet its goals;
- partnership normally involves financial transactions, where the partner is awarded a financial compensation for realisation of activities in the project;
- cooperation is not be that of supplier – customer relationship.

In case of a project planned in partnership, the Partnership Declaration (Annex No. 2a, respectively 2b) is a mandatory attachment to the project application.

3.5. The number of project applications and grants per the applicant / project partner

- The applicant may not submit more than one project application in any of the five outcomes within one round of calls for proposals with same deadline³.
- The applicant may be in a role of a project partner in other project applications at the same time.

Should an applicant submit more than 1 project application in one round of calls for proposals with the same deadline, the FO will register as eligible only the first project application arrived on the basis of submission date and hour. Any other project application submitted by the same applicant will be rejected.

3.6. Project funding

Project funding consists of:

- a) the grant from the programme amounting up to 90 % of the total eligible project costs,
- b) the own resources (co-financing) of the project promoter and project partner/s in amount of minimum 10 % of the total eligible project costs. The co-financing shall be provided in the form of cash or in-kind contribution in the form of voluntary work. The in-kind contribution may constitute up to 50 % of the co-financing.

The minimum and maximum grant amount per grant is set in two categories as follows:

strategic project: 80,000 € – 100,000 €

Partnerships at project level will also be encouraged through favourable scoring of projects with donor state partners and by increased grant ceilings up to **120,000 €** in case of a strategic project) to finance bilateral activities within supported projects. These extra resources can be used solely for financing of expenses related to common co-operation of international partners.

Payments of the project grant shall take the form of advance payments, interim payments and a final payment. Interim and final payments to the projects shall be based on approved interim and final project reports. The level of the advance payment to projects is up to 30 % from the grant, of the interim payment up to 40 % from the grant and the final payment is up to 10 % of the approved grant amount.

For more information regarding payments, please refer to the *ACF – Slovakia Guidelines to the eligibility of expenses*.

³ The ACF calls: 01 – 3, 02 – 3, 03 – 3, 04 – 3 – Z, 04 – 3 – M, 05 – 3, open on January 26, 2021, www.acf.sk.

In-kind contribution is eligible only as voluntary work. Such in-kind contribution may constitute up to 50 % of the co-financing required for the project. The price of voluntary work shall be set in the range of 2.759 € per hour (minimal gross hourly wage in Slovakia) to 5.60 € hour (average gross hourly wage in Slovakia) depending on the character of delivered work.

3.7. Duration of projects

The duration of projects in this call for proposals must be as follows:

strategic project: 18 – 24 months

3.8. Eligibility of expenses

Costs within the project may be eligible from the date on which the grant is awarded or at a later date set in the project contract. The project contract shall set the final date of eligibility of costs which shall be no later than **30 November, 2023**. Costs incurred after that date are not eligible.

The inclusion of an expenditure item in a project budget approved by the FO cannot be considered as a prerequisite of its eligibility.

Detailed information on eligibility of expenses is stipulated in the document *ACF – Slovakia Guidelines to the eligibility of expenses*.

3.9. Calculation of indirect costs

Indirect costs 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. Applicants (project promoters) and their project partners may apply a flat rate of up to 15 % of direct eligible personnel costs to cover these costs.

4. Evaluation criteria

The evaluation criteria and a scoring chart:

Group of criteria / criterion	Maximum score
1. Relevance, usefulness and added value of the project	45
1.1 Coherence between the project and the Programme results and their indicators	20
1.2 Implementation of the project with a partner from a donor country	10
1.3 Relevance of the project to the needs of direct and indirect target groups and beneficiaries	10
1.4 Sustainability of the project results	5
2. Implementation of the project	22
2.1 Relevance and feasibility of the suggested activities	10

2.2 Collaboration with other organizations and experts, involving the public and professionals	5
2.3 Quality of communication of project results towards the public	7
3. Value for money – the budget and effectiveness of expenses	20
3.1 Reasonable and justifiable budget	12
3.2 Coherence with the proposed activities	8
4. Experience of the applicant (and partner) and capacity to implement the project	13
4.1 Experience of the applicant (and partner) and relevancy of previous activities of the applicant (and partner) in relation to the project	8
4.2 Personnel and technical capacities of the applicant (and partner)	5
Total	100

Any application that receives an average score less than 70 points will automatically be rejected (see part 7.5.2. of this Open Call for Proposals).

5. Timeframe

Publishing of the call for proposals:	26 January 2021
Deadline for submitting project applications:	29 April 2021, 23:59 (CET)
Publishing of project application evaluation results (indicative):	30 September 2021
Indicative start of project implementation:	1 November 2021

6. Financial allocations

Financial allocations in this call for proposals is **441 695 €**

No additional funds will be allocated to the call while the call is still running.

7. Preparation, submission, evaluation and approval of project applications

7.1. Preparation of project applications

A project application must be prepared:

- in compliance with the *ACF – Slovakia Guidelines for Applicants and Project Promoters*;
- in compliance the *ACF – Slovakia Guidelines to the Eligibility of Expenses*;
- using the *Project Application Form* and its prescribed annexes forms available in the online grant system.

The documents above are inseparable from this call for proposals and are available at www.acfslovakia.sk.

7.2. Consultations and providing information to applicants

The Fund Operator (FO) shall provide information to applicants in written form, by phone, e-mail, in the form of personal consultations till 5 working days before the deadline for project application submission and also at information seminars. The questions collected by phone, e-mail, on information seminars and through personal consultations will be addressed in the dedicated section *Questions and answers* at www.acfslovakia.sk, with due care of data protection rules.

The contact details for consultations are provided in the section 8 of this call.

7.3. Project application submission

Project application must be submitted online together with the following documents:

- **Project application** (prescribed online form)
- **Mandatory annexes:**
 - Annex No. 1 Project budget
 - Annex No. 2 Annex No. 2a: Partnership Declaration (if the project is implemented in partnership) and Annex No. 2b: Partnership Declaration in English (if the project is implemented in partnership with a foreign institution)

Prescribed forms of mandatory annexes are available in the [ACF Slovakia online grant system](#).

- **Non-mandatory annexes:**
 - Preliminary approval of a public or expert organisation with realisation of-a project activity, if it is necessary for realisation of the activity
- **The documents must be submitted only through electronic submission in the [ACF Slovakia online grant system](#) in the following way:**
 - the project application by filling in the project application form;
 - the Annexes No. 1, and 2. (if relevant) electronically as attached documents in the xls, pdf, jpg formats.

7.4. Confirmation of project application registration

The applicant shall be informed on registration of the project application automatically by online grant system by sending an e-mail notification. The FO shall publish a list of registered project applications at www.acfslovakia.sk no later than 7 days since the deadline for submitting project applications in this call.

7.5. Evaluation of project applications

Project application evaluation process:

7.5.1. Reviewing compliance with the administrative and eligibility criteria

The FO shall review the project application in terms of meeting criteria of administrative and eligibility criteria.

If missing, the applicant will be able to supplement the Annexes No. 2 and No. 3 by e-mail within a period of 5 working days, based on the FO e-mail request sent to the applicant contact e-mail address.

The FO may request also additional information / documents from the applicant to determine the compliance with administrative criteria.

Without compliance with the set administrative criteria, the project application shall not be further assessed.

Applicants whose project applications are rejected at this stage shall be informed by the FO of the reasons for the rejection and given a period of 10 working days to appeal that decision through the complaint form available at www.acfslovakia.sk.

Those project applications, where the appeal has been accepted are included back in the further process of evaluation and it shall be a responsibility of the Complaint Committee and the Selection Committee to review the reasons for rejection.

7.5.2. Expert evaluation

Each project application that meets the administrative and eligibility criteria and also each project application that was excluded by the FO on the basis of non-compliance with the administrative and eligibility criteria but the applicant has successfully appealed shall be reviewed by two impartial experts appointed by the FO. At least one expert shall be independent of the FO. The experts shall separately and independently score the project application according to the selection criteria published with the call for proposals (for the details, please refer to the *ACF – Slovakia Guidelines for Applicants and Project Promoters*). For the purposes of ranking the projects, the average of the scores awarded by the experts shall be used. If the difference between the scores given by the two experts is more than 30 % of the higher score, the project application shall be scored by a third expert. This expert shall be commissioned by, and be independent of, the FO. In such cases the average score of the two closest scores shall be used for the ranking of the project applications.

7.5.3. Recommendations of the Selection Committee on approval / rejection

The Selection Committee evaluates project applications based on expert evaluation and making recommendations to the Board of the Open Society Foundation in terms of their approval or rejection.

7.5.4. Final decision of the Board of the Open Society Foundation

The Board of the Open Society Foundation makes a final decision on which project applications shall be approved.

7.6. Information on the results of project application evaluation

Expected date of informing on approval or rejection of project applications is 30 September 2021.

The list of supported and rejected project applications shall be published at www.acfslovakia.sk.

8. Contact details

Programme web pages: www.acfslovakia.sk

The Open Society Foundation staff responsible for implementation of the Programme in the Outcome Strengthened civil society advocacy and watchdog role:

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Financial manager:

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E-mail contact for submitting a complaint to the ACF – Slovakia Complaints Committee:

staznost@acf.sk