

CALL FOR PROPOSALS: 1ST CALL FOR THEMATIC PROJECTS

CALL FOR PROPOSALS

The Operator of the Active Citizens Fund – Regional programme, i.e. the consortium made up of the Foundation in Support for Local Democracy (leader), the Education for Democracy Foundation, and the Information Society Development Foundation, issues the first call for thematic projects. The Active Citizens Fund – Regional Programme is funded by Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway through the EEA Grants.

The legal framework for the Programme is provided by:

- Protocol 38C of the EEA Enlargement Agreement on the EEA Financial Mechanism (2014-2021),
- Memorandum of Understanding on the Implementation of the EEA Financial Mechanism 2014-2021 between Iceland, the Principality of Liechtenstein, the Kingdom of Norway and the Republic of Poland,
- Programme Implementation Agreement on the implementation of the Active Citizens Fund - Regional programme in Poland financed from the EEA Financial Mechanism 2014-2021, between the Financial Mechanism Office European Free Trade Association and the Foundation in Support of Local Democracy,
- Manual for Fund Operators of the Active Citizens Fund.

The total allocation earmarked for grants in the first call is EUR 11,955,000,

with the following amounts allotted to particular support areas:

- Area 1. Human rights protection (including gender equality): EUR 2,850,000,
- Area 2. Promoting social diversity and preventing exclusion: EUR 2,950,000,
- Area 3. Building democratic culture and civic engagement at local level (including activism for environment and climate change): EUR 4,155,000.
- Area 4. Supporting the development of civic sector (implemented as module in Area 1–3 projects): EUR 2,000,000.

All grant applications should contribute to achieving the planned Programme outcomes in at least one of the four support areas described below.

The Programme aims to ensure a balanced distribution of projects across Poland's regions and increase the chances of smaller local and regional organisations for receiving grants and implementing key Programme actions. That is why adequate representation of the voivodeships will be considered in the selection process.

Should there be a significant imbalance between the voivodeships, the selection committee may decide to take this into account when assessing the projects to be supported for funding

The criteria for selection are thus, as follows: total score, allocation for outcomes incl. special focus and voivodeships allocation.

The prerequisite condition to receive the grant is a score awarded by evaluating experts, which is equal or exceeding 50% of the total score. Nonetheless, not all the project applications given a score of 50% and more will be funded.

There are two types of grants available in the call for proposals: small grants and large grants.

Small grants:

- minimum grant amount: EUR 6,000
- maximum grant amount: EUR 23,000
- implementation period: 6 to 18 months,
- co-financing: optional,
- for organisations which have been operating for at least 6 months (as at the date of call announcement, i.e. 17 March 2021),
- it is required to have at least one person with experience in the selected support area on the project implementation team,
- Applicants may apply for additional funding towards bilateral cooperation with Donor State entities: up to 15% of the basic grant amount (up to EUR 3,450),
- Applicants may apply for additional funding towards capacity building: up to 22% of the basic grant amount (up to EUR 5,060).

Large grants:

- minimum grant amount: EUR 23,001
- maximum grant amount: EUR 84,000
- implementation period: 12 to 24 months,
- co-financing: optional,
- for organisations which have been operating for at least 12 months (as at the date of call announcement, i.e. 17 March 2021),
- Applicants must demonstrate experience in implementing at least 3 projects in a selected support area in the last three years (completed projects and – in the case of grant-funded projects – settled by the date of call announcement, i.e. 17 March 2021),
- Applicants may apply for additional funding towards bilateral cooperation with Donor State entities: up to 15% of the basic grant amount (up to EUR 12,600),
- Applicants may apply for additional funding towards capacity building: up to 22% of the basic grant amount (up to EUR 18,480).

Applications will only be accepted via the Electronic Grant Application and Management System (EGAMS), available at: www.generator.aktywniobywatele-regionalny.pl

The Operator reserves the right to reallocate funds between calls and years of Programme implementation.

Application timeline:

- from 12.00 (noon) CET on 17 March 2021 to 12.00 (noon) CET on 17 May 2021.

Announcement of call results:

- administrative and eligibility evaluation of applications: by 11 June 2021,
- content-related evaluation of applications: by 30 September 2021.

ABOUT THE ACTIVE CITIZENS FUND – REGIONAL PROGRAMME

Active Citizens Fund – Regional is a programme funded by Iceland, Liechtenstein, and Norway (hereinafter referred to as 'Donor States') under the European Economic Area Financial Mechanism (so-called 'EEA Funds') open to 15 EU Member States in Central and Southern Europe.

EEA Funds have allocated funding for civil society organisations. EUR 53 mln has been set aside for supporting civil society organisations in Poland. This amount has been broken down into two parts: EUR 30 mln for the Active Citizens Fund – National programme¹ and EUR 23 mln for the Active Citizens Fund – Regional programme.

The Fund aims to strengthen civil society, promote active citizenship, empower vulnerable groups at risk of exclusion, and level the playing field in terms of opportunities.

Furthermore, the Programme seeks to develop bilateral relations between civil society and entities based in Poland and Donor States, and to promote regional exchange and networking, with particular emphasis on sharing knowledge and good practices in strengthening civil society.

Grant competitions offer support for actions taken by Polish civil society organisations – independently or in partnership with other entities from Poland, the Donor States (Iceland, Norway and Liechtenstein), the Beneficiary States eligible for EEA Funds (Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Greece, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia), and Poland's non-EEA neighbours (Belarus, Ukraine, Russia). When implementing a project with a partner from a Donor State, you may apply for additional funding to cover partnership costs.

The Programme supports actions conducted by organisations based across Poland, however project activities cannot take place in the city of Warsaw. In particular, we will provide funding for actions taken by less experienced organisations operating outside of large agglomerations and in areas with limited access to aid and infrastructural support schemes, as well as by organisations targeting vulnerable groups at risk of discrimination and exclusion.

We will give priority to projects which engage youth – in the capacity of both participants and recipients of project actions – and focus on climate change and environmental protection.

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.

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. The Programme shall be consistent with sustainable development, long-term economic growth, social cohesion and environmental protection. The Programme shall follow a results and risk management approach.

¹ Active Citizens Fund – National programme is being carried out by a consortium made up of the Stefan Batory Foundation (leader), the Shipyard Foundation, and the Academy of Civic Organizations Foundation (for more, go to: <https://aktywniobywatele.org.pl/>)

AREAS OF SUPPORT IN THE CALL FOR THEMATIC PROJECTS

Area 1. Human rights protection (including gender equality)

Actions aiming to raise awareness about human rights and equal treatment, counteract and prevent human right violations and all other forms of discrimination, provide support to those suffering from human right violations and/or discrimination.

Projects in this area should contribute to:

- better understanding of the principles behind human rights and equal treatment, of how they are related, and how they impact everyone's every-day life – not just particular communities or target groups, but also their leaders and those acting to the benefit of such communities (activists, public officials, social workers, etc.);
- limiting the impact and weight of stereotypes, prejudice, discrimination, hate speech, and disinformation in the area of human rights and equal treatment, which includes challenging the belief that human right and equal treatment principles are being used to fight for unearned privilege;
- appreciating and recognising human rights as a vital factor which impacts national decision-making;
- improving the skills of individuals, non-governmental organisations, and public institutions acting for human rights and equal treatment (project beneficiaries other than representatives/employees of project promoters);
- increasing the number of sectoral and cross-sectoral actions for human rights and equal treatment;
- reducing the number and severity of human right violations, and ensuring equal treatment of victims.

Area 2. Promoting social diversity and preventing exclusion

Actions aimed to raise awareness about the needs of minority group members and those at risk of social exclusion; raise awareness of social inequalities; accelerate social integration; empower minority group members and people at risk of social exclusion.

Projects in this area should contribute to:

- raising citizen awareness of and empathy for social inequalities and the problems experienced by vulnerable groups;
- boosting social integration and reducing exclusion by taking high-quality educational and development actions, as well as developing and promoting models of effective

collaboration for diversity and counteracting exclusion at local, regional, and national levels;

- empowering members of excluded groups by strengthening their voice, ensuring representation and advocacy which impact social policy at both local and national levels.

In the context of implementing the general objectives of Area 2, providing basic social services can be supported only if such services are connected with awareness raising, advocacy, empowerment, or reform initiatives. Moreover, it is important and reasonable that organisations and individuals who represent groups at risk of exclusion or discrimination take initiatives falling within Area 2.

Area 3. Building democratic culture and civic engagement at local level (including activism for environment and climate change)

Actions aimed to show how non-governmental organisations impact the development of local communities and democratic culture; strengthen civil society; increase the significance of citizenship education; expand cooperation and partnerships at local level; enhance critical thinking skills; strengthen watchdogs; disseminate knowledge on climate change.

Projects in this area should contribute to:

- fuller, deeper understanding of the meaning and importance of democratic mechanisms in decision-making, especially amid crisis;
- giving project participants opportunities for a personal and positive experience of participating in democratic decision-making at local level and/or acting for the common good;
- disseminating knowledge on tools and procedures of democratic decision-making, as well as the skill of using them in practice;
- promoting a conciliatory approach to resolving local issues, creating space for discussions, debates, and dialogue (in this context: also improving visibility/recognition of NGOs as vital actors in social life)
- raising awareness about the significance and role of information, and enhancing competences related to verification and interpretation of information obtained from different sources
- promoting democratic practices in existing local institutions, such as units of local government, other public institutions, non-governmental organisations and informal groups;
- increasing direct involvement of members/local residents in impacting local policy;

- building involvement in actions for the community (citizenship education, trust, dialogue), bolster a sense of agency, ensure stronger citizen involvement (also in every-day matters) and community mobilisation, promote volunteering and acting *pro publico bono*;
- facilitating cooperation between local stakeholders, i.a. for deepening processes of social integration;
- obtaining social competences, indispensable for active involvement in social life.

Area 4. Supporting the development of the civic sector

In this area, we will allocate funds to building institutional capacity of applicants and partners that are granted funds for thematic projects in Areas 1–3.

Projects in this area should help organisations acquire the skills of:

- clearly defining their mission (what their actions aim to change, what makes their organisation different from others), making sure that their mission responds to diagnosed needs of specific target groups, development plans of local governments, and specific sectors, e.g. social assistance, education, etc.;
- fulfilling their mission in a flexible and agile way, which stems from an ongoing reflection on long-term goals which reaches beyond the timeline of individual projects;
- diversifying their budgets so as to minimise dependence on a single source of funding/donor to the extent possible. Increasing the share of e.g. citizen contributions to ensure stable operations and independence in defining goals and methods;
- implementing effective fundraising strategies – increasing financial independence by pursuing business activity and for-profit public benefit activity, and forming non-profit Polish limited liability companies (sp. z o.o.);
- improving management by making effective use of digital tools to implement projects, work in teams, and communicate with target audiences;
- advancing partnerships and networks of cooperation with other organisations and informal groups, as well as public institutions and companies;
- offering stable and attractive jobs to personnel and volunteers, along with opportunities for ongoing competence development. Boosting their motivation for fulfilling the organisation's mission by giving them a say on the directions of the organisation's development.
- reinforcing transparency. Making advocacy more effective, making it easier for others to understand the advantages arising from their actions and their role in the development of civil society.

Special focus areas are parts of the above support areas. Applicants will be awarded **additional points** for selecting them:

In Area 1:

- Actions involving migrants and refugees
- Actions supporting LGBT+ persons
- Anti-discrimination actions

In Area 2:

- Counteracting domestic violence

In Area 3:

- Watchdog activity
- Ensuring residents participation in policy-making at local level

Approx. 5% of the allocations earmarked for each support area of the Programme will be allotted to financing projects covering special focus areas..

Detailed descriptions of support areas are available in attachment 1 (also on the Programme website: <https://aktywniobywatele-regionalny.org.pl/konkurs-1/>), while planned Programme outcomes and particular support areas are described in attachment 18 (also on the Programme website: <https://aktywniobywatele-regionalny.org.pl/konkurs-1/>).

CAPACITY BUILDING

Each Applicant seeking a grant for a thematic project may request an additional grant amount for capacity building:

- for small grants: up to 22% of the basic grant amount, up to EUR 5,060;
- for large grants: up to 22% of the basic grant amount, up to EUR 18,480.

The funds will be made available for both the Applicant (leader) and the project partner(s), on condition that the partners are civil society organisations.

Applicants seeking funds for capacity building are required to draft a capacity building plan (part of the application form). However, this plan will not be subjected to expert evaluation and points will not be awarded for this part. The plan should detail: the current situation of the organisation, an assessment of challenges and needs arising from its mission and vision, the process of necessary changes and its operationalisation, resources necessary for its implementation, and the specific actions planned.

The following elements are prerequisite to receive additional funding for capacity building:

- a grant awarded for a thematic project in one of the three support areas;
- approval of the capacity building plan (as presented in the application or as modified after consultations with tutor).

Organisations whose capacity building plans are approved will be encouraged to participate in additional classes with a tutor (e.g. on developing their organisation's strategy).

Funds for capacity building may be spent on:

- preparing and implementing the organisation's strategy, incl. establishing partnerships, networking (also on an international level),
- strengthening and developing employee competencies (training, post-graduate studies, study visits, job shadowing, participation in conferences, purchasing licences for e-learning courses),
- purchasing equipment and furnishings (in particular: IT infrastructure, equipment for more effective action implementation),
- improving working conditions, e.g. small repairs and adapting the workspace to the needs of employees and target audiences.

Grants for capacity building can be used to carry out the following actions:

- building cross-sectoral coalitions and networks of organisations dealing with similar issues;
- image and visibility building at local level, advocacy (incl. campaigns);
- preparing and implementing the organisation's strategic plan for capacity building, incl. increasing employment and engaging volunteers in its current activity;
- developing expert competences related to the specific area covered by organisation activity;
- reorganising the work system and improving management mechanisms;
- adapting organisation operations to the new conditions induced by the COVID-19 pandemic.

ELIGIBLE APPLICANTS

Applicants, i.e. entities who intend to submit applications independently or assume the role of partnership leaders, must meet the following criteria:

- they are registered with the National Court Register (KRS), entered into the register of ordinary associations or the register of Rural Housewives Circles maintained by the President of the Agency for Restructuring and Modernisation of Agriculture (ARiMR);
- at the time of submitting the grant application, they have been registered for at least six months (for small grants) or twelve months (for large grants);
- they are capable of presenting their financial statements prior to signing the grant agreement or, if they are not required to draft financial statements, a comprehensive summary of revenue and expenditure for the last reporting year or the last 12 (for large grants) or six months (for small grants);
- they are independent of local, regional and central authorities, public entities, political parties and for-profit entities;
- they do not seek to generate profit, and – if they pursue business activity – any profit made is allocated to the objects and aims listed in their memorandum of association;
- they act for the common good, not only to the benefit of its members²;
- they act for the public interest, are driven by democratic values, and respect human rights;
- no application for declaring bankruptcy has been filed against the Applicant, the Applicant is not in liquidation or receivership, has not suspended activity and there are no similar proceedings pending against the Applicant;
- they are not in arrears with public-law payments payable to the Tax Office (US) or Social Insurance Institution (ZUS);
- no governing body member has been convicted of an intentional crime prosecuted by public indictment or a tax offence.

Applicants can have the following legal form:

- **associations, including ordinary associations.** Before signing the grant agreement, ordinary associations will be asked to present:
 - a written consent/resolution of all members to enter into the grant agreement,
 - a power of attorney for the association's management board / representatives to sign the grant agreement on behalf of the association;

² Grants are not available for professional associations who aim solely to support and protect the interests of its members. Entities whose activity is limited to supporting only one entity, e.g. a specific school, university, theatre, are not eligible for grants

- **foundations.** Foundations with a single-member management board and no supervisory body are not eligible for a grant;
- **unions of associations** established under the Associations Law Act of 7 April 1989 (references to Polish Journal of Laws: Dz.U. z 2020, poz. 2261);
- **social cooperatives.** A social cooperative is eligible for grants if it is composed only of natural persons and/or non-governmental organisations and/or church legal persons as defined in the Social Cooperatives Act of 27 April 2006 (references to Polish Journal of Laws: Dz. U. z 2020, poz. 2085);
- **non-profit companies** (Polish joint stock and limited liability companies who do not seek profit, who allocate any and all of their profit to the implementation of the objectives listed in their memorandum of association, and who do not distribute profit between their shareholders and employees. These conditions must be specified in the company's founding documents: memorandum or articles of association). Moreover:
 - a company is eligible for a grant if its shareholders are only the following entities (one or more): associations, unions of associations, foundations, social cooperatives, rural housewives' circles, faith based organisations, which belong to the group of entities eligible for a grant,
 - companies with only one organisation as its shareholder, and with a single-person management board, are not eligible for a grant;
- **rural housewives' circles** established under the Rural Housewives Circles Act of 9 November 2018 (references to Polish Journal of Laws: Dz. U. of 2020, poz. 553, 932), acting as associations pursuant to the Associations Law Act of 7 April 1989 (references to Polish Journal of Laws: Dz. U. z 2020, poz. 2261) or acting as independent rural circles under the Act on Social and Professional Farmer Organisations of 8 October 1982 (references to Polish Journal of Laws: Dz. U. 2019, poz. 491). The grant cannot exceed the amount determined by the circle members as the highest liability amount which their entity can incur;
- **faith based organisations** 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), on condition that:
 - the objectives listed in their memorandums of association include public benefit activity,
 - they are registered with the National Court Register (KRS);
 - they may incur liabilities on their own behalf.

The actions presented in the application must be compliant with the memorandum of association, bylaws and other documents detailing the mission, aims and methods of the Applicant. The Applicant's activity cannot consist in religious practices or leading a religious cult (including proselytising and spreading faith), political party activity or election campaigns. Moreover, a grant cannot be allocated for business or for-profit activity. It is not permitted to collect fees from project participants, i.e. applicants may not charge a fee for tickets to project events or sell project publications.

ATTENTION: Please check if the Applicant really meets the above criteria. We do not require documentation confirming the above declarations upon application submission. While evaluating the applications, we will rely on the Applicant's declarations. Once a grant is awarded, the Applicant will be requested to present documents confirming the declarations made. The detailed list of required documents can be found in *Guidelines for Applicants and Project Promoters* (see Chapter 10.1.1). If the Applicant fails to produce such proof, it will not be possible to sign the grant agreement. If it is revealed that the Applicant made false statements in the application, the grant agreement will not be signed.

ELIGIBLE PARTNERS

The Applicant can implement a project independently or in cooperation with a Partner or Partners. Partners must share project values, actively participate in project preparation and implementation, and comply with the formal and legal requirements of the Programme.

The following entities can be Partners to a project:

- **non-governmental organisations, public and private entities, non-profit and for-profit entities based in:**
 - Poland,
 - other Beneficiary States eligible for EEA Funds (Bulgaria, Cyprus, Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Greece, Hungary, Lithuania, Latvia, Malta, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia),
 - Donor States (Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway),
 - neighbouring states, i.e. non-EEA countries neighbouring on Poland (Belarus, Russian Federation, Ukraine);
- **international organisations, their bodies and representations,**

- **informal groups from Poland**, on condition that they act for public good, are voluntary and non-discriminatory, and are independent of local, regional and national authorities, as well as other public authorities, political parties, religious institutions and for-profit entities.

Informal groups shall be represented by one single person, who signs the project partnership agreement on behalf of the group. An informal group cannot be a direct recipient of the grant.

It is inadmissible to establish a partnership when:

- one of the entities is the founder/partner/shareholder of the other organisation;
- there are personal relations between the entities, i.e. the same persons sit on the governing and/or supervising bodies of both entities;
- the leader of the informal group (i.e. the potential partner) sits on the governing and/or supervisory body of that entity.

The involvement of Partners, their roles and tasks, must be confirmed in a written declaration. This document is required already at the stage of application submission. Once a grant is awarded, a partner agreement must be signed before the grant agreement is concluded.

More information on the entities eligible for becoming Partners and partnership requirements are available in the '*Guidelines for Applicants and Project Promoters - 1st call for Thematic Projects*' (Chapter 4.3 and 4.4.).

Partnerships with Donor State entities

Organisations who will prepare projects in partnership with entities from Iceland, Liechtenstein and/or Norway may apply for additional funds (additional to the basic grant amount) to cover the costs of Partner participation and bilateral cooperation in the project. This additional amount is not dependent on the number of Partners from Donor States and may amount to:

- for small grants: up to 15% of the basic grant amount, and no more than EUR 3,450,
- for large grants: up to 15% of the basic grant amount, and no more than EUR 12,600.

Projects including partnerships with entities from the Donor States will be given extra credits by experts during the process of proposals assessment. To ensure good quality of the partnership and the project (bringing added value to both sides), experts will evaluate not only the sole fact of establishing a partnership, but the value and capacity of such partnership.

More information on eligible expenditures within funds for bilateral cooperation is available in Chapter 6 of the '*Guidelines for Applicants and Project Promoters - 1st call for Thematic Projects*.'

ATTENTION: The above-mentioned limits for additional funds for bilateral cooperation do not exclude the possibility of financing more bilateral cooperation activities from the basic grant amount.

The Donor States contact points:

- Iceland: Icelandic Human Rights Centre, <https://www.humanrights.is/en>
- Norway: Norwegian Helsinki Committee, <https://www.nhc.no/>.

CO-FINANCING

Project Promoters (successful Applicants) are not required to provide co-financing.

This solution comes as a change to the initial Programme rules. Owing to aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Financial Mechanism Office and the Operator decided on lifting the co-financing requirement.

However, if the Applicant declares co-financing, then it can be made as a contribution in kind (only in the form of voluntary work) or a financial contribution – irrespective of the grant amount.

ATTENTION: The project grant rate applies equally to all expenditure. It means that the co-financing should be specified proportionally for all budget lines.

TIMELINE OF THEMATIC PROJECTS IMPLEMENTATION

In the small grant path, the project timeline must fall within 6 and 18 months.

In the large grant path, the project timeline must fall within 12 and 24 months.

Project actions must commence within three months from call result announcement, i.e. at latest by 31 December 2021, but not earlier than on 1 October 2021. Projects must be completed by 30 September 2023.

In exceptional, well-founded cases, it is possible to prolong project duration during project implementation, within the Programme's timeframe. Such an extension requires the consent of the Operator and the signing of an annex to the grant agreement.

LIMITS ON THE NUMBER OF SUBMITTED AND IMPLEMENTED PROJECTS

In the first 2021 grant competition of the Active Citizens Fund – Regional programme, each eligible entity may:

- submit one application independently or as leader (if submitting an application with partner(s));
- apply as a partner to any number of projects, on condition that it does not submit an application of its own – one organisation may submit only one application as Applicant/ leader per call, and be listed as partner in only one application submitted by a different leader.

Receiving a grant in the first call does not preclude participation in subsequent calls.

DEADLINE FOR APPLICATIONS AND APPLICATION EXAMINATION TIMELINE

Electronic Grant Application and Management System will open for applications **at 12.00 (noon) CET on 17 March 2021 and close for submissions on 12.00 (noon) CET on 17 May 2021.**

Applications will only be accepted via the Electronic Grant Application and Management System (EGAMS), available at: www.generator.aktywniobywatele-regionalny.pl.

Instructions for Use are available in the EGAMS (also on the Programme website <https://aktywniobywatele-regionalny.org.pl/konkurs-1/>, attachment 4).

Applications submitted without using the EGAMS will not be examined.

Decisions on grant awarding will be announced by 30 September 2021.

We will publish the list of entities who were granted funding on the Programme website. Applicants will be notified of evaluation results via e-mail. Completed evaluation sheets will be made available in the EGAMS.

Application forms for small and large grants, together with instructions for their completion, are available in attachments 2-3 (also on the Programme website <https://aktywniobywatele-regionalny.org.pl/konkurs-1/>).

REQUIRED ATTACHMENTS

Applicants are required to provide the following attachments to applications submitted *via* the EGAMS:

- Communication Plan (in PDF, RTF, MS Word or Open Office format). A CP template is available in attachment 5 (also on the Programme website: <https://aktywniobywatele-regionalny.org.pl/konkurs-1/>). More information on CP-related requirements is available

in the *'Guidelines for Applicants and Project Promoters - 1st call for Thematic Projects* (Chapter 8.1).

- Scanned Partner declarations (in PDF, PNG, JPG or JPEG format) which specify Partner role and tasks in the project. Declarations must be signed by authorised representatives of the Partner(s). This point applies only if a given project will be carried out in partnership with other entities. If a project involves more than one Partner, we require a separate declaration for each Partner. A Partner declaration template is available in attachments 13-14 (also on the Programme website: <https://aktywniobywatele-regionalny.org.pl/konkurs-1/>).

COST ELIGIBILITY

Eligible costs

Eligible expenditures of projects are those actually incurred by the project promoter or the project partner, which meet the following criteria:

- they are incurred between the first and final dates of eligibility of a project as specified in the project contract;
- they are connected with the subject of the project contract and they are indicated in the detailed budget of the project;
- they are proportionate and necessary for the implementation of the project;
- 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;
- 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,
- they comply with the requirements of applicable tax and social legislation.

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).

Project Promoters and Partners' (whether Partners use grant funds or provide co-financing) 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.

Please bear in mind that entering a cost into the budget presented in the project application is not sufficient to recognise that cost as an eligible cost. In the course of project implementation, budgeted and anticipated costs must be verified in terms of their principles of economy (minimising the cost of resources used or required), efficiency (the relationship between the output from goods or services and the resources to produce them), and effectiveness (the relationship between the intended and actual results of spending).

Excluded costs

The following costs shall not be considered eligible:

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

Excluded costs also include costs of such barred actions as:

- transferring monies or in-kind benefits to natural or legal persons (except for in-kind prizes and gifts, incl. gift vouchers and cards for the purchase of such in-kind prizes and gifts, whose value does not exceed PLN 200 per person),
- regranteeing, i.e. disbursing funds to third parties under a separate grant procedure,
- actions consisting in financing religious practices or religious cults (including proselytising and spreading faith), political party activity and election campaigns,
- actions pursued as part of business activity or for-profit public benefit activity.

DIRECT AND INDIRECT COSTS

Direct costs

Direct costs encompass all eligible costs incurred as a result of implementing the actions listed in the application, incl. costs of any partnerships (if applicable) and capacity building.

The following constitute direct costs:

a) **personnel costs**, *i.e.* wages of the personnel assigned to the project and employed pursuant to the Polish Labour Code or under civil-law contracts pursuant to the Polish Civil Code, on condition that these costs comply with the remuneration rules and rates applied by the Applicant (and its Partner(s)). Personnel costs include *i.e.* the social and health insurance contributions paid by the employer, Labour Fund contributions, advance payments towards tax and, if applicable, payments towards the Guaranteed Employment Benefit Fund (FGŚP) and Employee Capital Plans (PPK).

Costs of wages of individuals hired under civil-law agreements who perform one-off short-term tasks in the project (e.g. hold workshops or training sessions, render graphic design services for specific project materials) fall within the category of "costs of purchasing materials, goods, and services, incl. subcontracting" (discussed in point c). Only individuals who render services of this type and have a long-term relationship with the Project Promoter, e.g. are members of that association, constitute an exception to this rule. In such cases, costs of such services should be reported as personnel costs.

b) **costs of project-related trips and daily allowances for personnel and volunteers** involved in project implementation, provided that they comply with the Regulation of the Minister of Labour and Social Policy of 29 January 2013 on Business Trip Allowance Amounts and Calculation for Employees of State and Local Government Budget Units, arise from signed agreements and/or adhere to the internal regulations of the Project Promoter as defined in its accounting policy, payroll regulations, employment contracts or other internal documents, and are not higher than those specified in the above Regulation; it is standard practice to travel second class or economy.

Costs of travel, accommodation, and catering incurred by participants and trainers in connection with project-related training sessions, workshops, and other events fall within the category of "costs of purchasing materials, goods, and services, incl. subcontracting" .

c) **costs of purchasing materials, goods, and services, incl. subcontracting**

This category comprises mainly purchases of any materials (e.g. materials for the participants of events funded from the grant), small equipment (which is not classed as fixed assets), as well as purchases of services indispensable to performing a planned action (rental of event space, catering, participant accommodation and travel, workshop hosting).

This category also encompasses outsourced expert services (based on a contract) to individuals, companies or other entities, for the purpose of performing a large part of a project action;

d) **costs of real property renovation – up to 50% of eligible direct costs;**

e) **costs of purchased tangible and intangible assets** must be categorised in line with the following rules:

- depreciation write-offs and write-downs on fixed assets/intangible assets can be categorised as direct costs, in whole or in part, proportionately to the usage of those assets for project implementation during project duration;
- depreciation value for different groups of tangible and intangible assets is subject to the rates presented in Appendix 1 to the Corporate Income Tax Act of 15 February 1992;
- direct costs may include all costs of purchasing tangible and/or intangible assets, if such assets are deemed by the FO to be an integral element of the project, and to be indispensable to project implementation and are of vital significance to achieving the planned outcomes (must be purchased at an initial project stage), will be insured (applies to fixed assets), and will be used throughout project duration and for five years after the date of project completion, and will not be used to conduct business activity, and will not be sold for profit; such costs can be categorised as eligible costs if a given tangible or intangible asset is specified in the grant agreement.

f) costs arising directly from project implementation requirements

Project implementation gives rise to costs which the Applicants must bear: creating a project website/subpage/social media profile to promote the project, travel costs, incl. costs of travel to events organised by the Operator as defined in Chapter 11 of *Guidelines for Applicants and Project Promoters*, and – if applicable – costs of opening a separate bank account/sub account or project-related bank operations. These costs can be carried in the budget.

Indirect costs

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.

When calculating indirect costs, please apply the flat rate of up to 15% of direct eligible personnel costs assigned to the project, capacity building and bilateral cooperation.

In particular, the following could be considered indirect costs:

- management board costs (wages of persons authorised to represent a given entity and other costs connected with that entity's governing body functioning),
- costs of assisting personnel (e.g. payroll specialist, accountant, legal and administrative services, secretariat - that cannot be properly attributed to the project direct costs),
- costs of office space, e.g. rent, lease, depreciation, security services, cleaning services, including cleaning products, electricity, heating, gas and water payments, and transmission and wastewater removal fees,

- costs of office supplies and equipment connected with office use, e.g. purchase, maintenance and depreciation,
- costs of postal, messenger, telephone and internet services, etc.,
- costs of asset insurance and public liability insurance.

To include indirect costs in project settlement, please indicate a flat rate in the project budget in the EGAMS and demonstrate that the applied flat rate represents a fair apportionment of the overall overheads of the project promoter or the project partner by presenting the calculation method which provides the grounds for applying the adopted flat rate. The indirect costs which will be financed within the admissible limit cannot exceed the costs defined in accordance with the organisation's principles for calculating indirect project costs.

You need to calculate the flat rate on your own. Please round this rate up to a full percent in your application.

These are examples of methods which can be used to calculate the flat rate of indirect costs:

- a) percentage share of project personnel costs in programme personnel costs of the organisation;
- b) percentage share of project costs in organisation's overall budget
- c) proportionately to administrative costs for a given project;
- d) or any other clearly established method.

The flat rate is determined once for the whole project implementation period.

The Project Promoter and the Partner(s) agree on the division of indirect costs. 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.

PROCUREMENT PROCEDURE

When purchasing goods or services whose value exceeds EUR 5,000 (approx. PLN 21,000), the Project Promoter must collect at least three offers (market research). The Project Promoter must select the best offer in terms of value for money or lowest price. The selection procedure must be documented. This rule also applies to the Partner, if the Partner makes such purchases. These principles aim to guarantee transparency, equal treatment, and fair competition.

Offers collected for market research purposes must be made for goods or services whose parameters are similar to those specified in the application. Offers may be collected in different forms, e.g. published price lists or replies to price inquiries. Collected offers do not have to be binding as defined in the Polish Civil Code. The Project Promoter and/or the Partner(s) must store

documents confirming the collection of at least three offers together with the project's financial documentation.

Collecting offers is not required for: costs connected with hiring personnel, purchasing municipal services, fuels, electricity, and costs capped by valid legal regulations, e.g. daily allowances, lump-sum allowances for transportation services, accommodation).

If a project is implemented in partnership with a Polish entity who is legally obligated to comply with the Polish Public Procurement Law, the Partner must also comply with that act of law when using grant funds. If a project is implemented in partnership with a foreign entity, the Partner must comply with the public procurement regulations valid in the Partner's country.

PROCEDURE OF APPLICATION EVALUATION

Applications will be subjected to the administrative, eligibility and content-related evaluation.

Administrative evaluation of applications

When evaluating applications for **small grants**, we will check whether the Applicant:

- is an entity eligible for a grant, i.a. whether the Applicant has been operating for at least 6 months before the date of call announcement;
- completed all form fields correctly;
- did not submit more applications and is not a partner to more applications (if the Applicant has submitted an application itself) than the Programme permits;
- has at least one person on the implementation team with experience in implementing projects in the selected thematic area;
- enclosed a communication plan;
- enclosed the declaration(s) of its Partner(s) which outline(s) Partner roles and tasks in project implementation (if the project will be implemented in a partnership).

When evaluating applications for **large grants**, we will check whether the Applicant:

- is an entity eligible for a grant, i.a. whether the Applicant has been operating for at least 12 months before the date of call announcement;
- completed all form fields correctly;
- did not submit more applications and is not a partner to more applications (if the Applicant has submitted an application itself) than the Programme permits;
- has experience in implementing at least three projects in the last three years (from the date of call announcement) in the selected thematic area;

- enclosed a communication plan;
- enclosed the declaration(s) of its Partner(s) which outline(s) Partner roles and tasks in project implementation (if the project will be implemented in a partnership).

Applicant eligibility will be determined based on the declarations enclosed to the application. A template of the administrative evaluation sheet is available in attachment 6 (also on the Programme website: <https://aktywniobywatele-regionalny.org.pl/konkurs-1/>).

If the Applicant makes a minor error when completing the form (e.g. enters an incorrect KRS or REGON number, misspells the organisation's name), the Applicant may correct such an error within three working days from sending a notification about the error to the Operator. Failure to correct such errors results in application rejection.

Applications which fail to fulfil any of the above-listed criteria will be rejected at the formal evaluation state, whereby the Applicant will receive extra time to correct minor errors (if requested).

Appeals against administrative evaluation results

The Operator will notify Applicants via e-mail if their applications are rejected on formal grounds. After receiving the Operator's notification about application rejection, the Applicant may appeal the decision within five working days from notification dispatch. The Applicant may lodge an appeal via e-mail. Appeals delivered upon the lapse of the five-day period will not be examined. The Operator will examine appeals against rejection decisions within 10 working days from appeal receipt. Decisions on accepting or rejecting appeals against administrative evaluation results are taken by the Programme Director. Once the administrative evaluation is complete, we will publish lists of all applications accepted for content-related evaluation.

Content-related evaluation of applications

The process of content-related evaluation involves:

- independent experts,
- the Selection Committee composed of two representatives of the Operator and three independent experts,
- the Executive Board composed of presidents of consortium organisations.

Proces oceny merytorycznej polega na:

- independent experts evaluating each application, and then discussing evaluation results at a meeting of experts who assessed applications in each thematic area,

- an analysis and discussion of the Selection Committee on the ranking lists created on the basis of independent expert evaluations, followed by formulating lists of recommended applications for the Programme Board,
- an analysis and discussion on the Selection Committee's recommendations, followed by the Executive Board's approval of the lists of accepted applications.

Applications will be evaluated by two independent experts – by thematic area, and separately for small and large grants. Ranking lists will be based on the average score awarded by the experts, provided that both evaluating experts consider a given application congruent with Programme objectives and thematic area assumptions. If one expert assesses an application as non-compliant with Programme goals and thematic area assumptions, but the other expert adopts a contrary opinion, or if the difference in expert opinions exceeds 30% of the higher score and, at the same time, at least one score exceeds 50% of the maximum score, the application will be subjected to additional evaluation by a third expert. In such cases, the ranking position will be based on the average of the two nearest scores or – if the difference between the scores is as indicated above – the two higher scores.

Application evaluation is a multi-stage procedure.

At first, projects are evaluated by independent experts who analyse project content and recommend further proceedings of capacity building plans. Recommendations do not impact the effects of project evaluation, they only determine the next steps concerning implementation of capacity building plan, which is either approved (and handed over for realization) or given “for modification” status (and submitted for tutor consultations and potential improvements).

The experts evaluate the assigned applications and formulate a preliminary evaluation. Next, once the individual expert evaluation of applications is complete, meetings are held to bring together experts evaluating applications in particular thematic areas. At the meetings, experts discuss all applications submitted for a given thematic area to assess the feasibility of achieving the planned Programme outcomes.

During the meetings, the experts formulate final application evaluations which form the basis for ranking lists. The ranking lists, which are based on expert evaluations, and the minutes of expert meetings on applications in a given thematic area, are put forth to the Selection Committee , which reviews them and decides which applications it recommends and does not recommend for a grant.

The following constitute additional issues which are taken into account when creating lists of projects recommended for grants:

- division of funds between three thematic areas, taking into consideration special focus areas;

- balanced distribution of projects which recognises the Programme's specific regional goals.

Detailed information on funds division is available in Chapter 3.8 of the '*Guidelines for Applicants and Project Promoters - 1st call for Thematic Projects*'.

Only applications whose average expert score is at least 50% of the total possible score will be entered into the list of applications recommended for a grant. The Board may introduce modifications to the ranking of individual applications, on condition that it justifies such a decision in the minutes of its deliberations on a given decision. The Selection Committee may recommend that the grant be decreased for applications where barred actions, ineligible costs or overestimated budgets have been identified. Each decision of the Selection Committee should be justified. The Selection Committee may also create a back-up list of applications recommended for a grant. The reserve list is intended only for applications where the average expert score is at least 50% of the total possible score and which did not win the Selection Committee's recommendation due to the fact that the allocation to the given call had already been exhausted.

Representatives of the following institutions are invited to participate in Selection Committee meetings in the capacity of observers: Financial Mechanism Office in Brussels, Ministry of Development Funds and Regional Policy (National Focal Point), Embassy of the Kingdom of Norway, and the Operator of Active Citizens Fund – National programme.

Decisions on awarding grants are taken by the Executive Board. Grant-awarding decisions are based on the lists of recommended applications prepared by the Selection Committee. The Executive Board checks whether application evaluation was performed in compliance with Programme procedures. In justified cases, the Executive Board can introduce changes to the list of recommended applications prepared by the Selection Committee, provided that it presents the grounds for such a decision in the minutes of its deliberations.

Appeals against content-related evaluation results

Applicants may not appeal content-related evaluation results nor Executive Board decisions. However, it is possible to file a complaint in the cases described in the '*Guidelines for Applicants and Project Promoters. Calls for Thematic Projects (Chapter 17)*', pursuant to the procedure specified therein.

Criteria of content-related evaluation

The criteria and rating scale used by experts are also presented in the content-related evaluation sheet, available in attachments 7-8 (also on the Programme website: <https://aktywniobywatele-regionalny.org.pl/konkurs-1/>).

Criteria	Score
project compliance with Programme aims and assumptions adopted for a given support area	YES/NO
<i>NOTE: Meeting the above mentioned criterion of compliance with the Programme aims and the assumptions for the given support area is a prerequisite for the project to be evaluated further.</i>	
Assessment of the project scope and involvement of partners	
project alignment with a special focus area	0-3
tackling priority themes - engaging youth	0-1
tackling priority themes - protecting the natural environment, and counteracting climate change	0-1
partnership with Donor State entities - is Partner selection well founded, is the Partner's role in the project vital for achieving the planned outcomes?	0-2
partnership with Beneficiary State entities and/or Poland's neighbouring states - is Partner selection well founded, is the Partner's role in the project vital for achieving the planned outcomes?	0-1
partnership with entities based in Poland - is Partner selection well founded, is the Partner's role in the project vital for achieving the planned outcomes?	0-1
Applicant's competences and resources, experience of the Applicant and the project team in the selected thematic area	
competences	0-2
experience	0-2

resources	0-2
Need for action	
quality of needs assessment	0-4
severity of the problem at local/regional/supra-regional level	0-3
outcomes and products – their quality and adequacy in terms of diagnosed problems and planned actions, sustainability potential	0-4
target groups – suitable selection in terms of diagnosed problem	0-2
planned actions – do they respond to diagnosed problems, are they well-planned for the specified target groups, and do they enable achieving the planned outcomes	0-8
communication plan	0-2
budget – is it economical, realistic, transparent and reliable, has it been drafted in line with Programme requirements	0-6
Coherence, logic and sustainability of project design	
projects internal logic and cohesion	0-2
potential multiplier effect / can the proposed solutions trigger systemic change	0-2
risk and project management are accurately defined and planned	0-2
TOTAL	0-50

The capacity building plans described in the applications will not be assigned scores by experts (are not an evaluation criterion), but will be assigned an opinion/status: 'approved' or 'modification/elaboration recommended'.

Applicants who receive a grant for a project in one of the three areas of support and whose capacity building plans have been approved will also receive additional funding for capacity building.

If experts assign the 'modification recommended' status, the capacity building plan must be adjusted and supplemented as agreed during one-on-one consultations with a capacity building tutor. Additional funding for capacity building is provided only if the tutor approves the capacity building plan.

GRANT DISBURSEMENT

Grants will be disbursed in tranches (advance payments, interim payments, and final payment) in compliance with the following rules:

- small grants are disbursed in at least three tranches:
 - initial payment: not more than 50% of grant amount after agreement conclusion,
 - at least one interim payment upon approval of interim report and spending at least 70% of received funds,
 - final payment: at least 5% of grant upon approval of final report;
- large grants are disbursed in at least three tranches:
 - advance payment: not more than 50% of grant amount after agreement conclusion,
 - for projects of up to 18 months – at least one interim payment upon approval of interim report and spending at least 70% of received funds,
 - for projects of 18 to 24 months – at least two interim payments upon fulfilment of above requirements,
 - final payment: at least 10% of grant upon approval of final report.

In keeping with the above rules, the number and amounts of payments are defined individually for each Project Promoter and specified in the agreement. Payment number and amounts depend on:

- awarded grant amount,
- planned project timeline,
- Project Promoter experience.

The final amount of the final payment corresponds to the difference between the sum of total eligible costs actually incurred and approved by the Operator as eligible for being covered from Grant funds, and the sum of all disbursed initial and interim payments. This amount will be

decreased by any interest accumulated in the Project Promoter's bank account or sub-account where the funds were deposited. The programme will also not cover negative interest. If the Project Promoter provides co-financing, and the actual value of that co-financing is lower than that presented in the application, the awarded grant amount will not be altered.

In justified cases (e.g. delays in project implementation, untimely or erroneous reports), the Operator may increase payment number and decrease payment amounts during project implementation. Such changes require an annex to the agreement.

Initial payments will be made within 14 working days from the date of placing the last signature on the agreement or submitting a blank promissory note with a promissory note declaration. Interim payments will be made within 14 working days from the date of the Operator's approval of interim reports. The final payment will be made within 14 working days from the Operator's receipt of a print-out of an approved final report signed by the Project Promoter's authorised representatives.

Upon project completion, the Project Promoter must return the unused portion of the grant within 14 working days from the date of final report approval to the bank account indicated by the Operator.

Payments will be made to the Project Promoter's separate PLN bank account or sub-account used solely for bank operations related to project implementation and capacity building actions set forth in the application.

SUPPORT FOR APPLICANTS

The Operator will provide Applicants with additional support in the form of *i.a.*:

- information meetings in regions,
- webinars on areas of support,
- webinars & consultations on special focus areas,
- webinars on international cooperation in projects,
- a webinar on communication,
- a webinar on most frequent errors in application submission,
- training in proposals writing,
- tutorial videos on using the EGAMS and creating project budgets,
- networking meetings showcasing good practices from other countries.

The *'Guidelines for Applicants and Project Promoters. Calls for Thematic Projects'* and other useful documents are available at <https://aktywniobywatele-regionalny.org.pl/konkurs-1/>.

Materials on application submission include: a guide to using EGAMS, application forms with instructions, suggested budgeting tools (MS Excel), document templates, and recordings of webinars and the Programme's opening conference.

CONTACT

If you have questions or doubts concerning applying for a grant, please contact us at <https://aktywniobywatele-regionalny.org.pl/kontakt/>. Our consultants provide answers to questions about the Programme: rules for applying for grants and the formal preparation of an application.

We will publish answers to most frequently asked questions on the Programme website.

LIST OF ATTACHMENTS (available in Polish)

1. Guidelines for Applicants and Project Promoters - 1st call for Thematic Projects
2. Project Outline Form, with Guidelines for large grants
3. Project Outline Form, with Guidelines for small grants
4. Instructions for use of EGAMS
5. Communication plan outline form with guidelines
6. Project Outline Administrative Evaluation Sheet for small/large grants
7. Project Outline Content-related Evaluation Sheet for large grants
8. Project Outline Content-related Evaluation Sheet for small grants
9. Project Contract Template
10. Requirements for a Partnership Agreement between a Project Promoter and Partner
11. Partnership contract Template - polish legal entities (PL)
12. Partnership contract Template - international legal entities (PL)
13. Declaration of Partnership Template (PL)
14. Declaration of Partnership Template (PL/ENG)
15. Programme logotypes
16. EGAMS address: <http://generator.aktywniobywatele-regionalny.org.pl/>
17. Budget planning tool
18. ACFR PL Results Framework