



The Active Citizens Fund 2014-2021

GUIDELINES FOR APPLICANTS

BILATERAL COOPERATION INITIATIVES
(CALL 3)

Fund operated by:



Table of contents

1.	General information on ACF Malta 2014-2021	4
2.	ACF Malta call for Bilateral Cooperation Initiatives.....	5
2.1	Objectives and areas of support.....	5
2.2	Call priorities.....	5
2.3	Eligible applicants	6
2.3.1	Eligibility criteria for applicants.....	6
2.3.2	Eligibility criteria for donor state partners.....	7
2.4	Timing and location of initiatives	8
2.5	Communication and visibility	9
3.	Financial parameters	9
The total available funds to be distributed as grants under this call are €70,000.....		9
3.1	Double funding	9
3.2	Eligible expenditure	9
3.2.1	General principles on the eligibility of costs in initiatives	9
3.2.2	Direct expenditures.....	10
3.2.3	Indirect expenditures	12
3.2.4	Excluded expenditures.....	12
3.2.5	Procurement regulations.....	13
4.	Application process.....	13
4.1	Submission period	13
4.2	Pre-submission assistance	13
4.3	Application form.....	14
4.4	Submission procedure	14
Applications with the supporting documentation can be submitted as follows:		14
5.	Evaluation and selection procedure	15
5.1.	Administrative criteria	15
5.2.	Eligibility criteria	15
5.3.	Evaluation criteria.....	16

6.	Appeal procedure	16
7.	Conflict of interest	16
8.	Notification and award of the grant	17
8.1	Notification	17
8.2	Payment of the grant.....	17
9.	Reporting procedure.....	17
10.	Complaints procedure	18
11.	Further information	18

1. General information on ACF Malta 2014-2021

The Active Citizens Fund (ACF) is established under the EEA Financial Mechanism 2014-2021 and has a total budget of € 200 million that is granted by the Donor States of the European Economic Area Financial Mechanism - Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway - to 15 EU countries in Central and Southern Europe and the Baltics.

The objectives of the EEA and Norwegian Grants are to contribute to the reduction of economic and social disparities in the European Economic Area and to strengthen bilateral relations between the donor states and the beneficiary states.

The Active Citizens Fund recognises the fundamental role that the civic sector plays in ensuring democratic governance, human rights and social cohesion across Europe. ACF Malta also reflects the firm recognition of the sector's role as a fundamental building block of democratic governance, human rights and social cohesion across Europe. ACF Malta, thus, financially supports citizens' initiatives to boost collaboration, education and further development of the capacities of the civic sector.

The overall objective of the ACF Malta Programme is to strengthen civil society and active citizenship and to empower vulnerable groups.

The programme provides flexible and accessible funding with the aim of fostering an enabling environment for the civil society sector, strengthening its capacity, strengthening support for human rights and social inclusion and increasing citizen participation in civic activities. Initiatives are funded through open calls for proposals.

The ACF Malta is established through the Memorandum of Understanding between the Donor States and SOS Malta. The Fund Operator for the ACF Malta is Solidarity Overseas Service Malta (SOS Malta). The total amount designated for grant support for Malta is € 369,000.

These guidelines regulate the terms and procedures to applying for funding from the ACF Malta NGO programme.

Throughout these guidelines the term Fund Operator (FO) and ACF Malta team are interchangeable.

2. ACF Malta call for Bilateral Cooperation Initiatives

2.1 Objectives and areas of support

The overall objective of the ACF Malta Programme is to strengthen active citizenship and civil society and empower vulnerable groups.

The four areas supported by the ACF Malta Programme under this objective are: ¹

- Democracy, active citizenship, good governance and transparency.
- Human rights and equal treatment through combating any discrimination.
- Social justice and inclusion of vulnerable groups.
- Environment and climate change.²

This call is for bilateral cooperation initiatives between Maltese NGOs and entities in the Donor States (Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway) that support the following outcomes of the ACF Malta Programme:

- | | |
|-----------|---|
| Outcome 1 | Increased support for human rights and social inclusion |
| Outcome 2 | Increased citizen participation in civic activities |
| Outcome 3 | Enhanced capacity and sustainability of civil society |

Bilateral cooperation initiatives are intended to support activities that enhance relations between Maltese NGOs and entities in the Donor States (Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway) and contribute to the overall objective of the Active Citizens Fund.

2.2 Call priorities

The main aim of the bilateral cooperation initiatives is to strengthen the capacity and effectiveness of NGOs in Maltese civil society. Priority will be given to areas of concern that will actively contribute to the overall objective of the ACF Programme in Malta, such as civic engagement (especially among youth); promotion and protection of human rights; watchdog and advocacy roles of the civil society sector (focusing especially on how to influence policy-makers and cooperate with local authorities); empowerment of vulnerable groups (with a focus on migrants); gender equality (especially women empowerment) and activities combatting gender based violence.

Each supported initiative shall contribute to at least one of the outcomes listed above.

¹ Provision of welfare and basic services shall only be supported as part of wider actions addressing awareness-raising, advocacy, empowerment and reform initiatives.

² Protection of the environment and climate change shall only be supported as part of measures to promote civic participation, advocacy, social innovation and active citizenship.

Supported activities (shall include but not be limited to):

- visits that have the aim of deepening partnerships through specific common activities.
- internships.
- networking, exchange, sharing and transfer of knowledge, technology, experience and best practice.
- visits by NGO experts / experts from Donor States entities to Maltese NGOs and vice versa for training / coaching purposes; and
- attendance to or organisation of conferences and workshops with a concrete impact on bilateral partnerships and relations.

2.3 Eligible applicants

This call is open for NGOs that are registered in Malta and are compliant with the Office of the Commissioner of Voluntary Organisations in partnership with at least one entity from one of the Donor States (Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway).

2.3.1 Eligibility criteria for applicants

Maltese NGOs must be enrolled and compliant with the Commissioner of Voluntary Organisations and in compliance with the Maltese Voluntary Organisations Act.³

Applicants shall have to provide proof that they are legally registered in Malta by providing a copy of their VO Certificate.

They must also meet the following criteria:

- They are a non-governmental organisation (NGO), i.e., a non-profit, voluntary organisation established as a legal entity, having a non-commercial purpose, independent of local, regional and central government, public entities, political parties and commercial organisations. Religious institutions and political parties are not considered to be NGOs.
- They meet the following principles:
 - 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

³ For details: <http://www.justiceservices.gov.mt/DownloadDocument.aspx?app=lom&itemid=8958&l=1>

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 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.
- 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 well-being 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.
- Abide by the principles of democratic values and human rights.

Applicants shall be directly responsible for the implementation of the initiative for which they are seeking a grant and must not act merely as intermediaries.

Only sole applicants may apply from Malta **(this call is not open to partnerships between NGOs registered in Malta)**.

2.3.2 Eligibility criteria for donor state partners

A donor state partner is a legal entity actively involved in, and effectively contributing to, the implementation of the initiative being proposed and whose primary location is in one of the donor states (Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway). Both public and private entities,

commercial and non-commercial, as well as non-governmental organisations may participate as donor state partners in the initiative.

The degree of involvement and the content of the partner's contribution will vary but only initiatives implemented between a Maltese NGO and a donor state partner will be considered under this call. The cooperation shall be mutually beneficial and input from both partners shall be necessary to achieve the initiative objectives. Donor state partners should be involved as early in the planning stages of the initiative as possible. The donor state partner should ideally be given the opportunity to contribute to the application.

The following Donor Contact Points have been set up to assist applicants to identify potential partners from the donor states. Questions on potential partnerships can also be submitted to these contact points:

- the Norwegian Helsinki Committee (www.ngonorway.org). This site also includes a database (<https://ngonorway.org/partners/>) to facilitate the identification of partners
- the Icelandic Centre for Human Rights (<https://www.humanrights.is/en>)

Potential applicants can also contact the ACF Malta team to help identify potential partners.

2.4 Timing and location of initiatives

Applications under this rolling call for bilateral cooperation initiatives will be received from **3 March 2023 until 31 June 2024** or until the available funds are exhausted (whichever occurs first). **Applications may be submitted at any time and shall be evaluated in a sequential manner and decided on a rolling basis.**

As a rule applications must be submitted at least 45 days ahead of the date of the planned activities. The ACF Malta team will evaluate the application and provide an official response of approval / rejection of an application at the latest 15 working days following the submission of the application. The duration of the initiative shall be counted from the date of the signing of the contract with the Fund Operator.

The activities foreseen in the application may take place in Malta and /or in one of the donor states. In well justified cases, bilateral cooperation initiatives may take place in other locations.

2.5 Communication and visibility

The initiative promoters⁴ must communicate their achievements and must acknowledge the support received from the ACF Malta to the relevant audiences at national, and/or local levels on their website, social media and other public channels.

All communication materials must be issued in line with the *EEA and Norway Grants Communication and Design Manual* which is downloadable through the ACF Malta website (www.activecitizensfund.mt/).

3. Financial parameters

The total available funds to be distributed as grants under this call are €70,000.

Bilateral Cooperation Initiatives can be supported up to a maximum rate of 100% of the eligible costs, with a minimum grant of €5,000 and a maximum grant of €15,000.

3.1 Double funding

The initiative being proposed for funding shall not be funded from other sources, either national or international. Double-funding of activities is not permissible.

Should double-funding of activities be indicated, the project promoter will be obliged to refund the funds granted to the Fund Operator in full and the agreement between the project promoter and the Fund Operator will be automatically terminated.

3.2 Eligible expenditure

Eligible expenditure refers to the expenditure incurred and disbursed by the project promoter when implementing the actions of the initiatives that can be charged to the initiative and that are in line with the budget presented with the application. The budget must be drafted on the basis of the principles and conditions listed below.

3.2.1 General principles on the eligibility of costs in initiatives

The principles set forth in this article shall apply in full to all eligible expenditures unless otherwise stated.

⁴ Successful applicants are referred to as Initiative Promoters.

Eligible expenditures of initiatives are those actually incurred by the project promoter which meet the following criteria:

- a. they are incurred between the first and final dates of eligibility of a initiative as specified in the initiative contract;
- b. they are connected with the subject of the initiative and they are indicated in the detailed budget of the initiative;
- c. they are proportionate and necessary for the implementation of the initiative;
- d. they are used for the sole purpose of achieving the objective of the initiative and its expected outcome(s), in a manner consistent with the principles of economy, efficiency and effectiveness;
- e. they are identifiable and verifiable, in particular through being recorded in the accounting records of the project promoter and determined according to the applicable accounting standards and generally accepted accounting principles; and
- f. they comply with the requirements of applicable tax and social legislation.

Expenditures are considered to have been incurred when the cost has been invoiced, paid and the subject matter delivered (in case of goods) or performed (in case of services and works). Exceptionally, costs in respect of which an invoice has been issued in the final month of eligibility are also deemed to be incurred within the dates of eligibility if the costs are paid within 30 days of the final date of eligibility. Overheads are considered to have been incurred when they are recorded on the accounts of the initiative promoter.

The initiative promoter's internal accounting and auditing procedures must permit direct reconciliation of the expenditures and revenue declared in respect of the initiative with the corresponding accounting statements and supporting documents.

3.2.2 Direct expenditures

The eligible direct expenditures for a initiative are those expenditures that are identified by the project promoter as specific expenditures directly linked to the implementation of the initiative and which can therefore be booked to it directly in accordance with their accounting principles and usual internal rules. The following direct expenditures are eligible provided that they satisfy the principles set out under clause 3.2.1 above:

- a. The cost of personnel assigned to the initiative, comprising actual remuneration including social security charges and other statutory costs as applicable, provided that this corresponds to the initiative promoter's usual policy on remuneration.

Internal Staff costs are to be calculated on the basis of the following formula:

Eligible staff costs = hourly rate X number of hours worked on the initiative supported by time-sheets. [Please refer to Annex 1 Staff Cost Calculator to calculate the hourly rate].

- Hourly Rate = Annual Salary / Total number of hours worked in a year
- Annual Basic Salary = annual basic gross salary pre-tax + employer's share of national insurance + maternity benefit + statutory bonuses
- Total number of hours worked in a year = [(52 weeks per year X number of working hours in a week⁵) – (hours of vacation leave⁶ + hours of public holidays not covered from vacation leave)]

b. Travel and subsistence allowances for personnel and volunteers taking part in the initiative, provided that they are in line with the initiative promoter's usual practices on travel costs:

- i. Travel Costs: Only the amount equivalent to economy tickets may be claimed, hence travelling which occurs in business class must be backed by a quotation for an economy ticket for reimbursement purposes.
- ii. Subsistence Allowance known also as Daily Allowance: This consists of a fixed subsistence allowance based on number of nights abroad. The amount of daily allowance must be in line with the relevant national legislation and internal rules of the entity when applicable; in the absence of such internal policy, the amount must be in line with the rates stipulated by the European Commission applicable for the period in question.⁷

c. Costs of consumables and supplies, provided that they are identifiable and assigned to the initiative.

⁵ Being pro-rata to employment of staff in question based on employment status and not hours contributed to the initiative; i.e. if an individual is employed on a 20-hour basis per week thus number of working hours per week shall read 20 in above equation

⁶ Being pro-rata to employment of staff in question based on employment status and not hours contributed to the initiative; i.e. if an individual is employed on a 20-hour basis per week thus vacation leave shall read 50% of total vacation leave application for full-time basis

⁷<https://international-partnerships.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2022-09/Per%20diem%20rates%20-%2025%20July%202022.pdf>

- d. Costs entailed by other contracts awarded by a project promoter (subcontracting) for the purposes of carrying out the initiative, provided that the awarding complies with the applicable rules on public procurement.

The provisions listed above shall apply entirely to all eligible expenditures incurred by all the parties concerned and involved in the implementation of the initiative.

All costs incurred by the donor country partner in connection with the implementation of the initiative shall be considered eligible provided that the above rules are complied with. Reimbursement of these costs will be made by the project promoter to the donor country partner and the project promoter will include these costs in its reporting to the FO. Such costs must be supported with relevant supporting documentation. These anticipated costs are to be included in the budget of the initiative.

3.2.3 Indirect expenditures

Indirect costs are all eligible costs that cannot be identified by the project promoter as being directly attributed to the initiative but which can be identified and justified by the project promoter's accounting system as being incurred in direct relationship with the eligible direct costs attributed to the initiative. They may not include any eligible direct costs. Indirect costs of the initiative shall represent a fair apportionment of the overall overheads of the project promoter or the donor country partner.

Initiative promoters may apply a **flat rate of up to 15% of direct eligible costs personnel costs to cover indirect expenditure.**

3.2.4 Excluded expenditures

The following costs shall **not** be considered eligible:

- a. Interest on debt, debt service charges and late payment charges.
- b. Charges for financial transactions and other purely financial costs, except costs related to accounts and financial services imposed by the initiative contract.
- c. Costs related to purchase of land or real estate.
- d. Provisions for losses or potential future liabilities.
- e. Exchange losses.
- f. Recoverable VAT.
- g. Costs that are covered by other sources.
- h. Fines, penalties and costs of litigation, except where litigation is an integral and necessary component for achieving the outcomes of the initiative.
- i. Excessive or reckless expenditure.

3.2.5. Procurement regulations

Notwithstanding provisions of national law that exempt NGOs from public procurement, any procurement procedures related to amounts above the European Union thresholds for procurement shall be undertaken in accordance with the applicable laws on procurement without regard for such an exemption.⁸

However, in cases of purchases related to an amount of €5,000 or higher but below the relevant European Union thresholds, the project promoter shall invite at least three suppliers/service provider to submit offers.

4. Application process

4.1 Submission period

This call shall remain open **until the 31 June 2024**, or until the available funds are exhausted, whichever occurs first. Applications may be submitted at any time and shall be evaluated in a sequential manner and decided on a rolling basis.

As a rule, applications must be submitted at least 45 days ahead of the date of the planned activities. The ACF Malta team will evaluate and provide an official response of approval/rejection of an application at the latest 15 working days following the submission of the application. All applications will be evaluated following the process and evaluation criteria detailed below.

4.2 Pre-submission assistance

Prior to drawing up and submitting an application, applicants may wish to contact the ACF Malta team for assistance with:

- a. identifying a relevant bilateral donor country partner; and /or
- b. aligning the proposed initiative aims with the objective of the ACF Malta Programme.

In such cases applicants are to submit a concept note (through the channels mentioned below) for consideration by the FO. The FO will submit feedback on the concept to the applicant within 5 working days of receipt.

⁸https://ec.europa.eu/growth/single-market/public-procurement/rules-implementation/thresholds_en

4.3 Application form

Applications must be submitted using the Bilateral Cooperation Initiatives application form (including its Annexes) that is downloadable from the ACF Malta website (<https://activecitizensfund.mt>) or the Citizens Lab website (<https://citizenslab.org.mt>).

Only complete applications meeting the eligibility criteria and providing all the required supporting documentation shall be considered for evaluation purposes.

4.4 Submission procedure

Applications with the supporting documentation can be submitted as follows:

By hand / post to the SOS Malta offices, 10 Triq il-Ward, Sta Venera.

OR

By sending a scanned copy of the signed and initialled application by email

To: acfmalta@sosmalta.org

Subject line: Submission of Bilateral Initiative application

The first page of the application should be signed in blue ink by a legal representative of the organisation. The rest of the application (including the Annexes) and all supporting documentation should be initialled on each page also in blue ink.

The following supporting documentation is to be annexed to the application and represents the administrative criteria that need to be met:

Copy of Voluntary Organisation Certificate ⁹	
Latest certificate of compliance with VO Office	
Copy of VAT Certificate if applicable	

⁹ In the case of a newly established NGO, a copy of the receipt of enrolment would suffice. As soon as the certificate is received, a copy must be submitted.

5. Evaluation and selection procedure

All applications will be reviewed for compliance with all three types of selection criteria, namely the:

- administrative criteria
- eligibility criteria; and
- evaluation criteria.

5.1. Administrative criteria

- The application has been submitted within the submission period.
- The application has been submitted in accordance with the permissible method(s) of delivery (with the right signatures etc.)
- All requested supporting documents have been submitted.

5.2. Eligibility criteria

- Eligibility of applicant
- Eligibility of application
 - The requested grant amount is within the permissible limits provided in the call.
 - The proposed implementation period is within the permissible limits provided in the call.
 - Only one application was submitted by the applicant under this call.
 - The allocation of indirect costs is equal to or less than 15% of direct eligible personnel costs.

The application is automatically excluded from further evaluation if one or more of the eligibility criteria are not met. However, prior to an application being rejected, the applicant will be given the opportunity to clarify and resubmit the application with correct information within 3 working days from notification. If the applicant fails to provide the missing information within this period, the application will not proceed to the next step of the evaluation.

Rejected applicants will be informed at the latest 15 working days following the submission of the application and have the right to appeal this decision within 3 working days of being notified about the rejection (see appeal procedure below).

5.3. Evaluation criteria

Applications that are in compliance with administrative and eligibility criteria are subject to an evaluation assessment based on the evaluation criteria below:

Criteria	Weight
1. Partnership fit and effectiveness	40
2. Relevance to the aims of the programme	30
3. Value for money / proportionality of proposed costs	30
Total	100

For the purposes of selection, only applications that obtain an overall score equal or greater than 60 points shall be considered.

6. Appeal procedure

If an applicant, activities or costs planned for the initiative do not fall under the administrative and eligibility criteria, the application will be subject to rejection. Rejected applicants will be informed at the latest 15 working days following the submission of the application and have the right to appeal this decision within 3 working days of being notified about the rejection. The appeal should be submitted via email using as subject text: 'Appeal' and sent to acfmalta@sosmalta.org. Appeals are reviewed by a board member of SOS Malta and the Chief Executive Officer and the decision will be communicated to the applicant by email not later than one working week following the submission of the appeal.

7. Conflict of interest

A conflict of interest situation is deemed to occur when a person involved in the selection process (e.g. independent experts, members of Selection Committees, members of the Board, staff involved in reviewing compliance with administrative and eligibility criteria, or decision-makers for the Fund Operator) has direct or indirect interests that are, or appear to be, incompatible with the impartial and/or objective exercise of the functions related to the selection process. Such interests may be related to economic interests, political or national affinities, family or emotional ties, other shared interests with the applicant or its partner, or any other interests liable to influence the impartial and objective performance of the person involved in the selection of initiatives.

SOS Malta shall take every reasonable measure to prevent a conflict of interest situation from occurring in the selection process. If such a situation arises, SOS Malta must take all the necessary measures to prevent such a situation affecting the integrity of the selection process.

8. Notification and award of the grant

8.1 Notification

Applicants will be notified of the results of their application by email within 15 working days following the submission of the application.

SOS Malta will sign a contract with successful applicants and the list of selected initiatives will be published on the ACF Malta website.

8.2 Payment of the grant

The grant payment shall be made to the successful Initiative Promoters in two transfers as follows:

- 60% as a pre-payment based on the budget as submitted and approved by the FO;
and
- 40% upon completion and approval of the final report and supporting documentation.

9. Reporting procedure

The project promoter shall submit a brief report on the actions undertaken and results achieved as well as documentary evidence on such actions (event invitations, attendee lists, meeting agendas, support materials for training, videos etc.) using the template provided by the FO. The project promoter shall submit this report up to 30 days following the completion of the initiative.

The Project Promoter and their partner from the Donor States will have to prove expenditure and attach relevant documents (e.g., salary slips, timesheets, travel orders, invoices, confirmation of payment) in accordance with the reporting requirements of the ACF Programme as set forth in the Guidelines for Bilateral Cooperation Initiatives.

In the case of inaccuracies or poor grounds regarding expenses, the FO will have the right to demand explanation and reimbursement of funds. Exceptionally, with reference to

expenditures incurred by project partners whose primary location is in one of the donor states, the proof of expenditure may take the form of a report by an independent auditor qualified to carry out statutory audits of accounting documents, certifying that the reported costs are incurred in accordance with relevant law and national accounting practices.

The Project Promoter shall submit this report up to 30 days following the completion of the initiative.

10. Complaints procedure

Any complaints specifically relating to selection process or the ACF Malta programme in general should be submitted via acfmalta@sosmalta.org using the text subject: Complaint.

The complaint will first be assessed by the SOS Malta staff and, if still unresolved, will be passed on to the Complaints Committee set up by SOS Malta. The Complaints Committee will include one member of the board of SOS Malta, the Chief Executive Officer of SOS Malta and a person that is external to the organisation. If requested, a meeting may be held with the FO and the unsuccessful grantee to discuss their proposal and the reason it was not selected in more detail.

The Complaints Committee will not address issues related to the administrative and eligibility criteria of the applications that were rejected. Such issues will only be dealt with through the appeal procedure.

11. Further information

The main reference documentation for this Call for Proposals is the *Guidelines for Applicants* (the present document) and the *Application Form* and its annexes which can be downloaded from <https://activecitizensfund.mt/> or the Citizens Lab website (<https://citizenslab.org.mt>). Information on successful initiatives will also be posted on these websites.

Questions related to this call must be sent by email to the address below:

E-mail: acfmalta@sosmalta.org

Subject: Questions - Bilateral Cooperation Initiatives Rolling Call

Any adjustments to the terms and conditions set forth in this notice shall also be publicised on the websites listed above.

Malta, March 2023