

Call for Coalitions

‘Fostering Coalition-Building among Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) to address the shrinking space for civil society in Europe’

This call for coalitions is the first launched by the newly established fund, Civitates. Civitates was set up by a consortium of 16 Foundations¹ committed to upholding democratic values in Europe. It is hosted by the Network of European Foundations (NEF), based in Brussels.

1. Call for Coalitions of CSOs

i. The Context

While this has been a phenomenon witnessed outside of the EU for many years, the shrinking space for civil society has now become a reality in several European Member States. In 2018, CIVICUS Monitor, which tracks civic space issues globally, identified 11 European members’ states where civic space has become ‘narrowed’ or ‘obstructed’. While civic space challenges vary according to particular national contexts, appearing more acute in countries such as Hungary, Poland or Romania, Civitates considers these challenges to be shared concerns for Europe as a whole.

Strongly embedded in the democratic system, an active and well-developed civil society at member-state and EU levels constitutes an essential protection against the erosion of values such as the respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality and the rule of law.

According to the Fundamental Rights Agency², civil society in Europe faces 5 main challenges:

- **Right to participate and exist:** CSOs are currently facing many hurdles in exercising this right at member-state and EU levels, including a lack of access to policy-makers and consultation mechanisms.
- **Safe space for civil society:** CSOs are currently facing smear campaigns and are being given a negative image in the public discourse.
- **Regulatory environment:** CSOs are confronted with regulatory hurdles imposed by Member States which infringe on their freedom of association, freedom of opinion, expression and information and their freedom to peaceful assemble.
- **Finance and Funding:** CSOs face several legal and practical hurdles in accessing funding which is crucial to their work (restrictions on “foreign” funding).
- **Space for exchange and dialogue:** CSOs lack possibilities and mechanisms to exchange best practices, and exchange in open, transparent and regular dialogue.

The shrinking space of civil society prevents its actors from voicing the concerns of different communities and in accessing governments and other democratic institutions to perform their watchdog role effectively.

¹ Adessium Foundation, Bertelsmann Stiftung, Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, Erste Stiftung, European Cultural Foundation, Fondation de France, Fritt Ord Foundation, King Baudouin Foundation, Körber Stiftung, Oak Foundation, Omidyar Network, Open Society Foundations, Robert Bosch Stiftung, Mercator Stiftung, Nicolas Puech Foundation, Stefan Batory Foundation.

² FRA 2017: “Challenges facing civil society organisations working on human rights in the EU”
<http://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2018/challenges-facing-civil-society-orgs-human-rights-eu>

During the late 2017, Civitates conducted consultations with national civil society experts to analyse how to foster the work of civil society groups within this context. **Internal** factors also challenge the work of civil society organisations. If exchanges and collaboration exist, they are often limited. Few examples of cross-sectoral actions exist where civil society organisations joined forces, even for a limited time, to collectively address issues with which they are confronted. Additionally, to be more effective, CSOs also need to build constituencies, diversify income sources, and improve strategic communications capacities.

ii. About Civitates

We believe in European democracies and their principles, where all citizens have the opportunity to access information, make their voices heard, organise, mobilise and engage fully in democratic processes.

As a collaborative philanthropic initiative, Civitates strengthens the capacity of civil society to play its indispensable role in shaping vibrant open European democracies that work for all.

For this, Civitates will work initially through two sub-funds: one dedicated to the ‘shrinking space for civil society’ and another one will contribute to build a free public discourse based on facts, independent analysis and a plurality of views.

iii. Objectives and Approach

Objectives

Through the sub-fund on ‘shrinking space’, Civitates aims to strengthen civil society by empowering its actors to respond to challenges related to the shrinking space collectively and more effectively.

Civitates will thus **reinforce the capacity of CSOs to conduct collective cross-sectoral local and national actions** by strengthening their operational capacities and advocating for their enabling environment.

Approach

Civitates will provide grants following a **two-phase approach**. The rationale behind this staged approach is to provide an initial space for organisations to come together so as to ultimately build strong national coalitions of actors in countries that will be active in ‘fighting back’ where the space for civil society is threatened.

Phase 1

Applicants can apply for **coalition-building grants of up to €10.000**. A maximum of 16 proposals will be selected for a **project period of 14 weeks**.

This seed (or development) funding is meant for CSOs active within one national context, who wish to connect, reflect and mobilise in search of a common ground and collective responses to address one (or more) of the main challenges referred to above.

The ambition of this phase is to provide the resources to the initial partners (**minimum of three**) to reach out to potential new partners from different sectors and regions in one country³, that will reinforce the coalition. The creation of cross-country coalition is not part of this call.

Eligible activities include, but are not limited, to: gathering and coordinating organisations (e.g. workshops, travels, meetings and trainings); fostering institutional development through external facilitation and technical assistance; and carrying out research/analysis/mapping.

³ The country has to be a member of the EU or EFTA

Phase 2

At the end of Phase 1, grantees are invited to submit a second proposal to apply for **coalition action-implementation grant** for the **implementation of local and national actions** developed and carried out by the Coalition.

A maximum of 12 proposals will be selected and awarded with up to **€ 100 000** per coalition for a project period of **18 months**. The selection between the two phases will be based on the quality of the coalition and its proposal.

Full submission guidelines for Phase 2 will be communicated **by September 1st 2018**.

In Phase 2, grant support will be available for specific direct project activities related to the implementation of local and national action plans as well as costs related to organisational/coalition strengthening, operations, and running of the coalition.

Civitates acknowledges that there may be existing operational coalitions that are already tackling urgencies related to the shrinking space and demonstrate a good match with the selection criteria of this call. Such coalitions are also welcome to apply and if selected will be permitted to use the coalition-building grant for actions related to Implementation. When submitting a proposal in Phase 2, this proposal will be fairly and equally assessed against the other proposals.

2. Guidelines for Submission

i. Eligibility Criteria

The Coalitions should have the following characteristics:

- a minimum of **three partners**
- be **composed mainly of non-profit, civil society organisations** but can also include other **actors** with a common goal (e.g. trade-unions, law firms, social enterprises, media)
- a national remit and involve organisations **throughout the eligible country**
- have (or aim to have) a cross-sectoral dimension: meaning that the members should be working in different fields (e.g. human rights, environmental, social services etc.)

Each coalition is represented by a lead applicant that completes and submits the proposal, and remains the main point of contact throughout the selection, contracting and implementation process.

The **lead applicant must be a charity or a non-profit organisation** registered in a country within the EU or EFTA. Existing networks or umbrella organisations cannot be the lead applicant but can be part of the Coalition.

ii. Selection Criteria

Phase 1:

- **Context analysis:** The proposal provides a clear analysis of the challenges the partners currently face and intend to address in their national context.
- **Rationale behind the coalition building** in its specific context: The proposal lays out the aims of the coalition to address the issues.
- **Diversity of the coalition:** The proposal demonstrates a clear intention to involve a range of different actors reflecting a cross-sectoral and geographical outreach.
- **Added-value of the grant to reinforce the Coalition:** the proposal demonstrates how the coalition-building grant will support the development of the Coalition.

iii. How to Apply

Eligible organisations are invited to fill out the [online application form](#). To access the application form, applicants are required to register.

Applicants will be asked to upload a simplified budget for which a template is provided [here](#).

Submissions must be done in **English**.

iv. Review and Decision-Making

The deadline to receive the applications for Phase 1 coalition-building grant is **June 15th 2018**.

Incomplete submissions or those that arrive after the deadline will not be considered.

All proposals will be assessed by independent experts on civil society. The final decision will be taken by a selection committee composed of partner foundations of Civitates, based on the independent experts' recommendations. The decision of the selection committee is final and cannot be appealed.

v. Timeline

Launch of the call	3 rd May 2018
Submission deadline: Coalition-Building Grant	15 th June 2018
Evaluation by independent experts	1 st week of July 2018
Selection committee Meeting: Decision	2 nd week of July 2018
Contracting with NEF: Coalition-Building Grant	3 rd week of July – 1 st week of August 2018
Coalition-building Phase 1	August-End October 2018
Guidelines for submission Phase 2	1 st September 2018
Submission deadline: Coalition Action Implementation Grant	15 th November 2018
Evaluation by independent experts	4 th week of November 2018
Selection Committee Meeting – Decision	1 st week of December 2018
Start of Coalition Action Implementation Phase 2	January 2019

vi. Contact and Disclaimer

For any additional questions, please contact Roy Virah-Sawmy at roy.virahsawmy@nef-europe.org

It is the responsibility of each applicant to make sure that proper approval has been received from the concerned individuals when it comes to personal data, in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation of the European Union. NEF reserves the right to ask for proof of such approval to the lead applicants.