



INSTITUTE FOR SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES

announces

REQUEST FOR APPLICATIONS

for Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) to support advocacy activities throughout Serbia
August 31, 2009

The Institute for Sustainable Communities (ISC) is implementing a \$14 million five-year program that seeks to support civil society in Serbia in its ability to influence public policy, serve as government watchdogs, and conduct sustained advocacy campaigns on a variety of reform issues. The Civil Society Advocacy Initiative (CSAI) helps citizens take responsibility for determining the kind of society they live in by increasing citizen participation in all aspects of public life. Through grants, training, and networking opportunities, CSAI helps citizen initiatives and civil society organizations more effectively communicate their priorities and coordinate with government and the private sector to tangibly improve people's lives. This program is made possible by the support of the American people through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

The Institute for Sustainable Communities (ISC) is an independent, non-profit organization that is actively engaged in helping citizens define their future through its groundbreaking approach to advocacy, which helps citizens work together to chart their shared future.

We define **ADVOCACY** as a set of hands-on technical skills and practices needed to effectively press for change. It is also the foundation of active citizenship, a process through which ordinary people learn to participate in decision-making at all levels. Identifying priorities, crafting a strategy, stepping forward, taking action, and achieving results are critical steps to finding one's voice, making oneself heard, and shaping one's future.

ISC's Advocacy in Practice Grants are awarded to civil society organizations to implement advocacy projects that are specific, concrete and focused on bringing about positive change through concrete action. To this end, we view advocacy outcomes in three fundamental areas: **Advocacy to achieve democratic change, institutional change, and policy change**. We define democratic change as citizens becoming aware of their power, and using this power to effectively participate in the decision-making process. We define institutional change as a decision-making process with greater accountability, transparency, and *involvement of citizens*. We view policy change as addressing problems by having a law amended, a policy made, or decree issued.

Through this Request for Applications, ISC aims to:

- Support CSOs working on issues that address citizens' concerns and are likely to successfully mobilize their constituents.
- Support initiatives that earn positive recognition by the media about the important work that CSOs are doing in communities across Serbia.
- Support innovative and creative activities that are well structured, consistent with the proposed objectives/results, well tailored to local/regional/national circumstances and are in line with the efforts to help move Serbia towards a more democratic and prosperous future.
- Encourage applications from CSOs outside of Belgrade with clear connections to a specific constituent base and applications that connect issues and citizens on the local level with CSO efforts to advance national policy reform.
- Support advocacy initiatives with strong citizen participation components and an emphasis on increasing citizen and stakeholder involvement in the advocacy campaign. While ISC is not directly prescribing these activities, *examples* may include petition drives, leadership workshops, door to door canvassing, material production, volunteer led community actions, etc. We strongly encourage applicants to propose new and innovative ways to engage citizens, including the use of new media technology (such as facebook or twitter but including others as well).
- Bridge the gap between larger national policy reform issues and local citizens' concerns.
- Support activities with demonstrated potential and a strong outreach strategy to help raise the visibility of civil society, as well as reach out to broad constituencies of citizens, government officials, CSOs, media and the private sector to build a common vision of the active and participatory role that each plays in a democratic society.
- Support advocacy initiatives that identify challenges in existing institutions, systems, procedures, laws, or norms in areas which affect the quality of life for citizens and that propose a set of activities and responses that will lead to specific, concrete, and lasting improvements.

ADVOCACY IN PRACTICE PROJECT CATEGORIES

ISC has identified 3 main thematic categories of advocacy projects to support through this competition. Because ISC places a high value on innovation, we encourage applicants to develop inventive ideas and approaches to best address these issues.

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY & TRANSPARENCY

- These projects may include efforts to create more transparent and accountable local, provincial and/or national governments and parliaments through greater engagement with CSOs on developing, proposing, discussing and debating legislation and policies. ISC is also interested in activities that monitor the functioning of governments and representative bodies at all levels as a means to better inform relevant CSOs and other stakeholders including the general public.
- These projects may address the problem of corruption in the public sector and include policy change, developing more efficient mechanisms for implementation of existing laws, raising awareness of the issue, and/or monitoring government activities such as public spending and management of public assets, eliminating causes of corruption in business regulation,

establishing transparent processes and procedures, providing legal advice to victims of corruption, and promoting the ethical conduct of public officials.

- Projects in this category may also address challenges in working with the political institutions of Serbia, and seek to advance the development of mechanisms for citizen participation, constituent influence in the political process, and more transparent, accountable and responsive democratic processes. These projects must be non-partisan and should focus on improvements in the institutions and mechanisms through which citizens and CSOs participate in governance at the local, regional, or national level.

SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC RIGHTS

- The projects in this category may focus on implementation of adopted laws guaranteeing economic rights to citizens that need to be implemented at various levels of society. Projects may promote citizens' rights such as the right to private property and the right to entrepreneurial activity. They may also address challenges in achieving more equitable labor relations through issues such as creation of safe working conditions, discrimination in the workplace and right to equal treatment, just to name a few. Consumer protection is another possible area of intervention where advocacy may be directed at imposing standards on the quality of goods and services as well as on pricing policies. In this category, ISC is looking to support all other issues that support economic and financial stability and lead to a more equitable and just distribution of resources.
- The projects in this category may also consider challenges in addressing priority needs of citizens in the area of social rights, especially groups such as pensioners, medical patients, children and people with special needs by developing practical new methods for addressing their needs and improving their social inclusion. The project may also address the challenges in the reform of the social welfare system, such as setting up new institutions and structures for assisting vulnerable groups, deinstitutionalization of social services, keeping government accountable and introducing new quality standards in social service provision. Innovative ways to address the gap between services once provided by the state and now often neglected altogether will be more successful when they involve CSOs working with local governments and when they demonstrate new models that can be transferred to other sectors and/or regions or communities.

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

- These projects include all types of efforts to protect, restore and promote Serbia's ecological health, including sustainable clean up of polluted areas, protecting pristine areas, honoring international conventions and establishing more responsible environmental stewardship and policy. Projects in this area should be structured around advocacy and lasting change to legal and regulatory systems or toward strengthening organizations and building partnerships which will continue to serve the interests of ecological health after the project is completed.
- These projects should entail lobbying for adoption and implementation of environmental legislation and policies, as well as trainings, dissemination of information and provision of public education. ISC will also support projects with a potential to mobilize communities and ordinary people to organize themselves, create coalitions and campaigns against pollution in their neighborhoods, enforce local or national environmental policies, show economic benefits of environmental actions and integrate environmental concerns or practices into market based policies, regulations and activities.

Please note that applicants may integrate more than one of the above mentioned issues into their proposals. For example, your project may show the economic benefits of recycling or how increased government transparency can lead to greater protection of socio-economic benefits for vulnerable communities.

ISC encourages applicants to consider ways in which their proposals can effectively lead to the empowerment and inclusion of vulnerable groups such as Roma, refugees, IDPs, elderly, youth, women, children and persons with disabilities.

RFA – GENERAL RULES

Registration. Only registered associations of citizens and foundations with their headquarters in Serbia may apply to this RFA.

Partnership. Based on previous experience in managing successful advocacy grants, applicants are strongly encouraged to execute their projects, whenever appropriate, in functional partnerships with other CSOs and in cooperation with other relevant stakeholders. Applicant's partners participate in implementing the action, and the costs they incur are eligible as those incurred by the applicant (Please see Budget Instructions in ISC Budget Form for more details). The organizations acting as formal project partners must fulfill the same eligibility criteria as the applicant organization (registered as association of citizens and/or foundation). The same organization may appear in the role of the lead applicant in one project and a partner in a project submitted by another lead applicant, taking into account its capacity and resources. ISC encourages partnership and cooperation with other relevant CSOs or institutions.

Eligible geographic coverage of the proposed activities. Proposed activities/expenditures must take place/be implemented on the territory of the Republic of Serbia in order to be eligible for funding. Cross border/inter-regional projects may be supported only in the parts taking place on the territory of the Republic of Serbia, if those are written as self-contained and consistent sets of activities.

Duration of the proposed activities. Preferred duration of the proposed activities is up to **12 months**. The project may be less than 12 months only if the objectives can be accomplished effectively in the proposed timeline.

Size of Funding. ISC intends to allocate US\$ 800,000 to this grant round, which translates roughly into 20 grants to be selected and funded. As such, ISC expects the selection process to be very competitive and will emphasize proposals that address critical reform issues with the potential to achieve results. Awarded grant amounts will **range from 25,000 USD to 40,000 USD per year**. The amount of any individual grant will depend upon the organizations' proposed projects and their capacities to manage funds. Grants selected through this RFA may have a possibility of extension beyond 12 months which will depend on availability of funds, demonstrated results, a revised annual work plan and approval by ISC for funding beyond the first year.

Grant funds requested from ISC. Funds may be used only for expenses directly related to the project activities. Funds cannot be used to construct or purchase new facilities or to reduce ongoing deficit

from pre-existing operations. No grant will be awarded to a proposal aimed solely at equipment purchase. Preference is given to those proposals that do not exceed 40% of administrative costs (budget categories 1 to 8) compared to program costs (budget category 9). Detailed Budget Instructions are available in the ISC Budget Form.

Minimum 10% of cost share. Proposed project must provide cost share in the amount of minimum 10% of the funds requested from ISC, either in the form of cash or in-kind contribution from a source other than the U.S. Government. *Any funding from another U.S. Government source (such as other USAID-funded programs, U.S. Embassy's Democracy Commission Small Grants Program etc) will NOT be considered cost-share.* ISC looks favorably at proposals with cost share higher than the minimum 10%. Cost share is a contribution which could come from your own organization's funds, facilities use, time volunteered, or donations of resources or items from other sources/donors that will assist in implementing your project.

EVALUATION PROCESS

In order to make the application process more accessible to CSOs with less experience in developing proposals for advocacy campaigns, but that are nonetheless strong organizations committed to addressing issues with demonstrated citizen support, ISC requests that applicants first submit a draft project proposal with estimated budget. These draft proposals may be in English or Serbian.

Approximately twenty five semi-finalists will be selected based on these draft proposals and invited to attend a one-day workshop that will provide an introduction to advocacy as well as individualized technical assistance in fine-tuning their respective advocacy initiatives.

Semi-finalists will then be asked to submit a final proposal and budget **in English only**. All applications will be evaluated on a competitive basis and within the context of CSAI program goals.

Below is a step by step view of the evaluation process:

- All draft proposals will be checked by ISC staff for eligibility (Please see a detailed description of eligibility requirements below).
- All eligible draft proposals will be reviewed and evaluated by a three person team composed of ISC program personnel and independent specialists in the areas of civil society and advocacy. Evaluators will make sure applications meet the specific selection criteria and are relevant to CSAI program goals (Please see detailed description below).
- Based on results of this evaluation approximately twenty five semi-finalists will be selected and invited to attend a one-day workshop about advocacy components and techniques as well as individualized technical assistance to help fine tune their proposal.
- Semi-finalists will then be asked to submit a final proposal in English. In addition to this, semi-finalists will be requested to submit the following documentation: Copy of Registration Certificate, Letters of Recommendation and, if applicable, Partnership statements and Copies of other donors' letters of commitment or grant agreements.
- A Selection Board consisting of representatives of USAID and ISC will make the final selection.

The approximate schedule for review of proposals submitted under this competition is as follows:

Announcement of competition	August 31, 2009
Deadline for receipt of proposals	October 15, 2009
Semi-finalists selected	November 13, 2009
Training for semi-finalists	November 18, 2009
Deadline for submission of full proposals	December 2, 2009
Approximate announcing of awarded grants	December 23, 2009

APPLICATION ELIGIBILITY

ISC staff will determine eligibility based upon the following eligibility criteria check list. **Please note that if an organization does not meet the eligibility criteria, the application SHALL NOT BE CONSIDERED.**

1. Applicant is registered as an association of citizens or foundation in the Republic of Serbia.
2. Draft proposal is submitted only using ISC forms, **either in English or in Serbian and is complete. (Please note that all final proposals must be submitted in English only.)**
3. Draft proposal is submitted in 3 hard copies and on CD.
4. Budget proposal is submitted in US Dollars.
5. Minimum 10% of total budget is from cost share (cash and/or in-kind contribution) from a source other than the U.S. Government.

PROJECT PROPOSAL EVALUATION CRITERIA

Draft proposals for Advocacy in Practice grants that have passed the eligibility check will be further evaluated. Following criteria will be used to identify successful advocacy projects:

1. Issue clearly defined and relevant to the target community and civil society in Serbia;
2. Project goal and objectives are specific, reasonable and appropriate to the target group;
3. Project leads to concrete, realistic and measurable results, and has influence beyond immediate participants, contributing to lasting change;
4. Proposed activities are well structured, consistent with the objectives/results and well tailored to local/regional/national circumstances;
5. Advocacy strategy/action plan is well developed and based on analysis, with concrete steps and actions towards each stakeholder;
6. Communication strategy is well-developed and aimed at increasing public awareness, engaging public and gaining support for CSO's position;
7. Applicant builds visible and dynamic coalitions or partnerships or otherwise cooperates with other CSOs, government, business and/or media to develop and present a common policy position and conduct coordinated advocacy activities;
8. Project involves significant numbers of constituents and/or members of a community taking part in activities;
9. Project involves unique and innovative elements that help expand the outreach and overall impact;
10. Applicant has capacity to carry out the proposed project, including adequate staff with relevant expertise;
11. Applicant has demonstrated advocacy experience with evidence of success;

12. Applicant has stable and sufficient sources of funding;
13. Proposed budget is cost-effective, ratio between administrative and program expenses is adequate and minimum 10% of matching funds is provided.

APPLICATION SUBMISSION PROCEDURE

Applicants are requested to submit **Draft Narrative Proposal in ISC Application Form** and **Budget Proposal in ISC Budget Form**. Draft proposals must be written either in English or Serbian and must be completed in full according to the given instructions. Applications must contain three hard copies of all required documents and an electronic copy of the application form recorded on a CD. Electronic copies of the application must be recorded in the following format: a) narrative proposal in MS Word (.doc only); b) Budget in MS Excel (.xls). If packed together, these documents must be compressed only in ZIP files.

All applications must be submitted in one envelope. The envelope must contain the title of the RFA as shown in the large square below and the applicant's name must be displayed on the back. Applications must be sent by post or hand delivered to the address listed below. Applications submitted by fax or e-mail shall not be accepted. ISC will not return any applications submitted.

NOTE: Application material can be downloaded from:

<http://www.iscserbia.org/news/> or <http://www.iscserbia.org/serbian/news/>

For additional information about ISC, please visit: <http://www.iscvt.org>

ISC will provide limited assistance to grant seekers in developing their proposals. Information sessions on proposal development will be held by ISC in four cities of Serbia. The schedule for these sessions will be announced soon.

Should you have any questions regarding the RFA, please send an e-mail to isc@iscserbia.org.
No phone calls please.

CLOSING DATE FOR RECEIVING APPLICATIONS: October 15, 2009 at 16:00 p.m. Applications received after this date will not be considered.

Applications must be sent by post or hand delivered to the following address:

<p>Reference: AP RFA August 2009</p> <p>Institute for Sustainable Communities Kneginje Zorke 96, III floor, apt. # 7 11 000 Belgrade, Serbia</p>

ISC's Office is open from Monday to Friday from 9.00 to 17.00 hrs. Phone: (+381 11) 3830 960