



INSTITUTE FOR SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES

Announces a

REQUEST FOR APPLICATIONS

for Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) to support Joint Initiatives

July 01, 2011

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. ISC is implementing a seven-year Civil Society Advocacy Initiative (CSAI) program that seeks to support civil society in Serbia in its ability to help 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 (CSOs) more effectively communicate their priorities and coordinate with government, the private sector, and others 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).

1. PURPOSE OF THE RFA

Through this RFA, CSAI will support [two groups of CSOs](#) that will [work together](#) to develop [innovative, adaptable and sustainable platforms](#) that allow citizens to more actively participate in the policy development process and equip CSOs to jointly and more [efficiently advocate](#) for concrete and tangible results. One award will be made in each of the following categories:

- Government Accountability/Transparency (GAT)
- Socio-Economic Rights (SER)

Additional information regarding each category- and [specific issues](#) that we are interested in- is available below.

What do we mean by working together?

While there are notable examples of CSOs working together in Serbia to advance a common goal - often with great success - these are often the exception and not the rule. Indeed, in many instances, CSOs continue to work on similar issues with little or no coordination between one another, or without capitalizing on the various skills or resources that individual organizations bring to the table. Not only does this waste resources, it also lessens the impact that concerted advocacy can bring. For this reason, CSAI believes that encouraging and supporting an increasing number of CSOs to work in partnership with one another as well as other stakeholders is critical to the long-term development of the civic sector in Serbia.

Creating Joint Initiatives

Accordingly, CSAI will support the establishment of two Joint Initiatives (JI), one in each of the categories mentioned above.

Groups of 4-6 CSOs are asked to submit a joint application that best explains how they will work together to achieve the objectives of this RFA. Applicants are required to demonstrate how their group will work together to cover the various dimensions of successful advocacy initiatives such as policy development, citizen engagement, awareness raising, and effective interaction with the media. It is important that each CSO participating in the project bring something to the table, whether that is expertise in policy analysis and development, lobbying and negotiating, outreach and awareness raising, citizen engagement, networking and partnership building, fundraising, etc. JI members should be organized as equal partners and should put in place a governing mechanism that clearly demonstrates a coherent strategy.

Applicants are also encouraged to [include stakeholders](#) from beyond the realm of civil society in their efforts. For example, some initiatives may wish to include representatives of relevant businesses, service providers or government representatives in order to better accomplish stated objectives or to better promote the project. Applicants should also consider partnerships with media representatives (including new media activists such as bloggers or well known Twitter users) in order to ensure constant and visible outreach and visibility. Applications must, accordingly, clearly and efficiently explain how roles and responsibilities within each group will be assigned and how each organization contributes to the initiative's overall success. Please see below to find out more about what kinds of costs are and are not eligible to be supported through this program.

By modeling effective cooperation, it is CSAI's hope that these JIs can become a model for further cooperation and will also highlight to citizens the importance and benefits of working together.

Issue Areas

Promoting government accountability and transparency and addressing Serbia's many outstanding socio-economic issues are critical to the long-term development of the country. They are also important prerequisites that Serbia must address if it wishes to join the European Union.

For the purpose of this RFA, ISC is requesting project proposals for initiatives in one or more of the following issue areas:

- ◆ Within Government Accountability and Transparency issues include Anti-Corruption, Strengthening Regulatory Bodies, Free Access to Information and Accountable and Transparent Policy Implementation and Monitoring.
- ◆ Within Socio-Economic Rights issues include Working Conditions, Youth Employment and Social Services¹

Innovation counts!

In addition to encouraging increasing number of CSOs to work together, CSAI is also interested in innovative ways that organizations propose to undertake effective advocacy. This may include creating new methods or models for advocacy, constituency building, fund raising, or outreach. It may also include innovative training methodologies. It's up to you.

Given advancements in the fields of new media and technologies, and how these are rapidly transforming Serbia- CSAI is especially interested in the creation of online platforms capable of bringing together CSOs and key stakeholders to increase the effectiveness and power of advocacy, while at the same time reducing costs. This can include the use of popular mediums such as Facebook, YouTube, Twitter or blogs. It can also include the creation of mobile apps, the use of open source software, geo-localization, crowd sourcing, etc. Again, it's up to you.

Please note that it is generally not enough to open a Facebook page- or something similar- for proposed initiatives. We are looking for innovative platforms that yield long term results and can be replicated or used by other organizations or people. These platforms should be interactive and engaging and help find solutions to concrete problems.

[Here are some illustrative examples](#) of innovative ideas from around the world that have caught our eye and may help give you some ideas.

How we define Advocacy

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,

¹ For more information please refer to the attached [Appendix](#).

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, CSAI will support project proposals that:

- ◆ Demonstrate the ability to define a mutually shared goal, with specifically defined objectives that will clearly lead to the further advancement of issues related to GAT and SER, and strive to address issues that are of most concern to citizens and likely to mobilize their support
- ◆ Develop creative and sustainable platforms for greater CSO participation in policy making and more efficient advocacy campaigns in GAT and SER program areas
- ◆ Support advocacy initiatives that identify challenges in existing institutions, systems, procedures, laws, or norms in areas that 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
- ◆ Increase utilization of social media and new technologies in the process of CSO advocacy
- ◆ Empower CSOs to deal with issues that have not been in their focus before
- ◆ 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 as part of the European Union
- ◆ Bridge the gap between larger national policy reform issues and local citizens' concerns, 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
- ◆ Clearly define key stakeholders, their specific roles and responsibilities and how they will work together with the JI to successfully accomplish the key goals of the campaign In particular, proposals that demonstrate how to build a mutual, interest-based partnership that will help bring in comprehensive skill sets, expertise and knowledge through the inclusion of relevant stakeholders
- ◆ Finally, to demonstrate that the JI is able to mobilize significant public support CSAI will require that applicants whose proposals reach the final evaluation stage gather 2,000 signatures in support of their initiative. CSAI prefers that applicants collect these signatures through existing online social networks (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, etc.). However, other, more traditional methodologies for collecting signatures- for example, distributing petitions on the streets- will be accepted. Once applicants are informed that their proposal has reached the finalist stage, CSAI will meet with each organization to make sure that the details of this requirement are clear.

In addition to grants, ISC will provide tailored technical assistance, in the form of trainings and individual coaching, throughout the implementation of the JI. JI members will also have an opportunity to participate in ISC's Advocacy Fellows Program, an intensive, tailored program of study and experiential learning in the United States where participants will engage with- and learn from- organizations and leaders that have dealt with similar issues and challenges, and successfully managed to create a meaningful impact.

2. GENERAL RULES

Below is the criteria that will be used by ISC staff to determine eligibility. Please note that if a proposal does not meet the eligibility criteria, it will NOT be considered for funding.

Who can apply

Only groups of registered associations of citizens and foundations with their headquarters in Serbia may submit an application for this RFA and receive a grant from ISC. Should your proposed initiative include stakeholders from beyond the world of civil society (e.g. bloggers, media, experts, etc), they cannot receive a grant directly from ISC. But some of their program costs may be eligible to be budgeted through one of the participating CSOs. Please note that according to ISC/CSAI rules and regulations costs for businesses, government and others may not be eligible for support. For additional clarification, please see the Frequently Asked Questions appended to this RFA or contact ISC for more information.

Eligible geographic coverage of the proposed activities

The proposed activities/expenditures must take place/be implemented on the territory of the Republic of Serbia in order to be eligible for funding.

Duration of the proposed activities

The preferred duration of the proposed activities is up to 16 months. The project may be shorter than 16 months only if the objectives can be effectively accomplished in a different timeframe.

Size of Funding

ISC intends to allocate a total of US\$550,000 for the purpose of this RFA. Approximately half of this amount will go to the GAT initiative and the other half will go to the SER initiative. Given that each JI is expected to be carried out by a group of four to six CSOs, it is recommended that the amount of US\$275,000 be divided between participating organizations, depending on the specific role, quality and quantity of activities to be performed by each organization. The individual range of funds allocated per each group member may vary between \$25,000 and US\$75,000.

Grant funds requested from ISC

Funds may be used only for expenses directly related to the project activities. Preference is given to those proposals that do not exceed 40% of operational costs compared to the total program costs. 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.

Minimum 10% cost share

Proposed projects must provide a minimum 10% cost share of the funds requested from ISC, either in the form of cash or in-kind contributions from a source other than the U.S. Government. Any funding from another U.S. Government source (such as other USAID-funded programs, the 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.

3. EVALUATION PROCESS

The first step in the process is to submit a concept note. This must be submitted in English. Approximately five concept notes from each program area will be selected to move on to the second round of the competition. In the second round, applicants will be invited to submit a full project proposal along with a complete budget. In addition, we are asking applicants who advance to this stage of the competition to submit two thousand signatures as evidence of community-wide/ public support for the project.

Below is a step-by-step outline showing how the evaluation process will be conducted:

- ◆ All concept notes will be checked by ISC staff for [eligibility](#).
- ◆ All eligible concept notes will be reviewed and evaluated by a three-person team composed of ISC staff and independent experts in the key program areas. Evaluators will ensure applications meet the specific selection criteria and are consistent with CSAI program goals (Please see detailed description below).
- ◆ Based on a review and evaluation of concept notes, approximately five proposals per program area, will be selected and invited to submit full applications, budgets and the requisite 2,000 signatures. Additionally, semi-finalists will be requested to submit the following documentation: Copy of Registration Certificates, Letters of Recommendation and, if applicable, copies of other donors' letters of commitment or grant agreements.
- ◆ Interviews with semi-finalists
- ◆ A Selection Board consisting of representatives of USAID and ISC will make the final decision on which projects are funded.

An estimated timeline for some of the key dates of the RFA process:

Deadline for submission of concept notes in English: August 10, 2011

Semi-Finalist selection: September 5, 2011

Deadline for submission of full proposals with signatures: October 1, 2011

Announcement of awarded applications: October 25, 2011

EVALUATION CRITERIA

The following criteria will be used to identify winning proposals:

1. Sustainability of the proposed governing mechanism of the JI with a clearly defined organizational and management structure that indicates how group members will operate
2. Previous experience and credibility in the field of GAT or SER
3. Previous results and achievements in conducting advocacy campaigns
4. Total number of collected signatures in support of the project
5. Previous experience working in coalitions or in cooperation with other stakeholders
6. Capacities of JI members to mobilize relevant partners and stakeholders in project implementation
7. Identified opportunities for obtaining continued funding sources, or means of long-term sustainability, following project completion
8. The proposal sets out clearly defined milestones indicating what needs to be achieved and by when throughout the duration of the project
9. The proposal has a credible implementation plan that is flexible enough to adapt to changing circumstance and to maintain growing support for the campaign
10. Project goals and objectives are specific, realistic, coherent and appropriate to the targeted audience
11. The project leads to concrete, realistic and measurable results, has influence beyond immediate participants, and contributes to lasting social change
12. Proposed activities are well structured, consistent with the objectives/results and well tailored to local/regional/national circumstances
13. Media and outreach strategy is well-developed and designed to raise public awareness, engage stakeholders and improve the image of civil society
14. Project involves a significant number of constituents and/or mobilizes community members to participate in project activities
15. Project incorporates innovative elements that create impact and maximize outreach
16. Proposed budget is cost-effective, ratio of administrative costs versus total program expenses is approximately 40% and a minimum 10% of total expenses is provided through cost share

It is our hope that projects develop innovative and lasting models that can be used in the future.

4. APPLICATION SUBMISSION PROCEDURE

First round - Concept Note:

Applicants are requested to submit a Concept Note online via the ISC/Serbia website at the link below. Only Concept Notes submitted online will be eligible for evaluation. All proposals, both the concept note and full application must be written in English and must be completed in accordance with instructions.

You can submit your concept note at:

http://www.iscserbia.org/joint_initiatives.php

Second round - Full Application:

Only Concept Notes that are selected for consideration in the second round will be required to develop full proposals with the abovementioned supporting documents. Applicants selected to take part in the second round will be provided the relevant application forms and detailed instructions.

CLOSING DATE FOR RECEIVING CONCEPT NOTE APPLICATIONS:

August 10, 2011 at 15:00

Applications received after this date will not be considered.

Applicants are strongly encouraged to pose any questions and inquiries, and to share their ideas regarding the application process, on ISC/Serbia's official [Facebook](#) and Twitter [#ISCKonkurs](#) accounts.

Frequently Asked Questions as [text](#) and as [video clip](#).

E-mail to: rfa@iscserbia.org