



A list of lessons learned from applications in the Third Round

Dear civil society organization applicants,

It might be helpful for us to provide some feedback from the Third Round to help applicants in future funding rounds. UNDEF received 2,143 applications in the Third Round of funding. The independent assessors that scored each application have provided the following feedback.

1. High “Pass Mark”

Overall, the quality of the applications was higher than in the second round but the “pass mark” was also higher. In the Second Round it was necessary to score at least 30 out of 40 (the 75 per cent point). For the Third Round two additional criteria were added, bringing the total to 50, and it was necessary to score at least 40 (the 80 per cent point). Only 317 projects scored 40 or higher and passed to the next stage of consideration. So the key issue for future applicants is how they can improve their applications to reach the “pass mark”.

2. Clarity

Clarity is the key to a successful application. That means the applicant must have a clear idea about what their CSO wishes to achieve and a clear strategy about how to achieve it. Clarity of ideas and methods shine through in the good applications. Lack of clarity cannot be disguised with “buzz” words or other formulaic constructions. The best advice is to brainstorm the ideas thoroughly before writing them down. Play the “devil’s advocate” and criticise the initial ideas until you have achieved a clear vision of what your CSO wishes to achieve and how you propose to do it.

3. Innovation

The assessors each read about 350 applications. Put yourself in their position. By the time they have assessed the 50th, 100th or 200th application, they are finding a great deal of repetition with similar concepts being described using similar words. Only one in seven of the applications they read will go forward for further consideration. So how can your CSO’s application stand out from the others? The answer is – innovation. Assessors will respond to a new idea, a new method or an original proposal. If the outputs of the project are simply more workshops to raise awareness, then it is unlikely that this will be sufficient to distinguish your application from the others. Ensure that the proposal is action oriented with concrete outputs that can be listed in the application.

4. Democracy

UNDEF was not established simply to fund good causes or good people. Arguing that your cause is just and your people are worthy is not sufficient. UNDEF is a Fund to promote democracy and each application must be able to show how the funding of that project will advance the cause of democracy. UNDEF focuses on supporting the voice of civil society and so the application must show how that voice will be strengthened and how that will strengthen democracy. The more direct the link, the stronger the application.

5. Presentation

The higher the quality the presentation, the higher the mark the assessors will give. Read the guidelines and the Q&A section carefully before drafting the application. Fill in all the information that is relevant. Do not exceed the character limits in the application form. Write in plain English or French, avoiding jargon where possible. Use correct acronyms and website addresses. Write succinct sentences and avoid repetition. Ensure that the information is accurate including in relation to possible executing agency and implementing partners.

6. Value for Money

Many applications scored badly on the criterion “value for money” by asking for far too much in their budget. The maximum grant UNDEF can make is \$500,000, but in over 200 projects to date, only one project has received this amount. The average grant is around \$300,000. The value for money criterion is scored out of 5 points. An application requesting \$499,000, but delivering the same outputs as a similar application asking for \$350,000, will probably score only 1 or 2 out of 5 for this criterion. That will probably be enough to knock that application out of the running. The more realistic the budget request, the better the score will be under the value for money criterion.

7. Budget

Give considerable thought to the budget. Make sure the budget relates to the outputs listed in the narrative part of the application. We understand that the budget is an estimate, so use rounded figures (in the thousands or hundreds is sufficient). Do not ask for a high amount of salary in the budget, as UNDEF looks for an element of volunteering in applications. Do not ask for a high amount in administrative costs as this is often a back door method of obtaining salary. UNDEF rarely funds the purchase of vehicles.

8. Timing

Please do not leave submission until the final day. We received dozens of “hard luck” stories about bad internet connections or electricity blackouts to explain why an application was late. We could not assist as the online proposal system was closed. Given that there were over six weeks for submission, a well prepared applicant would submit at least several days ahead of the deadline to ensure there is time if something goes wrong.

Good luck in your future applications.

The UNDEF team

- ✓ **Find a way to improve the application to reach the ‘pass mark’**
- ✓ **Be clear about what you want to achieve and how you propose to do it**
- ✓ **Make your proposal innovative so its stands out from the others**
- ✓ **Ensure a direct link to advancing the cause of democracy**
- ✓ **Write clearly and accurately**
- ✓ **Keep the amount requested realistic**
- ✓ **Ensure the budget relates to outputs listed**
- ✓ **Don’t leave submission to the last day**